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Eight Minutes in Wonderland

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Antennae

A photograph of a primate enclosure, likely a zoo. The background is a wall covered in small, green, square tiles. In the foreground, there are several horizontal wooden branches. A monkey is visible on a branch in the upper left. Another monkey is on a branch in the center, facing right. A third monkey is on the ground in the lower right, walking towards the left. The ground is covered with a layer of dry leaves and twigs. The overall scene is brightly lit.

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Pretty Ugly

Volume 1

Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson Uncertainty in the City Sonja Britz Beautiful Animals
in Hunting Wonderland Anne Katrine Gjerløff Fair and Square Andrew Patrizio
Eight Minutes in Wonderland Robin Thomson Zebronkey: Grazing in the
Photographic Field Roger Ballen Uncanny Animals Richard Billingham Zoo

EDITORIAL

ANTENNAE ISSUE 8 Volume 1

The Dandelion, a perennial herbaceous plant with its bright yellow flowers and its globular seed-head is one of the most recognisable plants that virtually grows world-wide and continues to charm young and old alike. In the supermarket isles and in the local health-shop too, herbal teas made of the plant are a popular detox remedy for the liver. Children, and secretly adults, love to blow the little seeds in the air and watch them as they disappear in the sky; the moment represents the beginning of a microcosmic dream: the seeds undertake the journey we never will.

However, should you decide to take a stroll to your local gardening centre, there, the Dandelion also appears, this time on a bottle of weed killer. Take a minute to read the information on the back and you will be reassured that after a few squirts of the liquid, the plant will self-combust to never appear again - in your garden that is.

How do we differentiate between an ornamental plant and a useful one, and how do we distinguish both from what we call a weed? How is it that a plant can easily simultaneously belong to all three categories of beautiful, useful, and pest at once?

This issue of *Antennae* looks at this paradoxical contradiction. What makes one plant or animal look pretty to us and what makes another appear ugly? What is desirable and what is undesirable? This investigation begins in the urban reality of Lancaster with the new project by Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson which invites us to re-think the notion of pest and the paradigmatic sets involved with the definition of an animal as such. "Dirt is matter out of place," Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson warn in order to explain "the extraordinary range of ways in which different societies distinguish between what is ritually 'pure' and what is 'defiling' or 'polluted'. Which may ultimately come down to the distinction between what is 'sacred' and what 'profane'. So, pests, like 'Dirt' are thought to be so when they are encountered 'out of place.'"

From this platform, the issue moves on to explore different facets of the problem and focuses on the 'beauty and ugliness' embodied in the trophy, further investigates essential aesthetic issues which demand donkeys to become a zebras, finds wild animals behaving just like Walt Disney would have loved them to at Kruger National Park, and encounters reassuring pets and farm animals that transmute into uncanny and disturbing presences.

Ultimately the notion of 'out of place' as unearthed by Snæbjörnsdóttir and Wilson, underlines the content of the issue extending the concept to the black and white photographic imagery of Roger Ballen and the captive animals of Richard Billingham confined in oddly decorated and run down zoos.

'Pretty Ugly' is a double issue of which this is only volume one. The second instalment will continue to explore the subject extending the concept of 'out of place' to that of 'sacred and profane'...dare I say no more, for the time being.

Giovanni Aloï

Editor in Chief of Antennae Project

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Battle at Kruger is an amateur wildlife video that depicts an unfolding confrontation between a herd of Cape Buffalo. After being posted on YouTube in 2007, Battle at Kruger became a viral video sensation and was widely praised for its dramatic depiction of wildlife on the African savannah. It became one of YouTube's most popular videos, with more than 37 million views and 40,818 comments as of 22 October 2008, and won the Best Eyewitness Video in the 2nd Annual YouTube Video Awards.

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UNCERTAINTY IN THE CITY

In January of 2007, as a consequence of an earlier urban-animal project having come to their attention, Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson were commissioned by the Storey Gallery, Lancaster, UK to research and make a proposal for a major new project.

Text by Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson
Uncertainty in the City, 2008 ©

Uncertainty in the City is an artists' project that begins with an examination of those animals that reside or nudge at the borders of our homes – those about whose presence we are ambivalent and over whose comings and goings we have a limited degree of control.

In our research we explore questions such as: What is a pest? What is the relationship between fear or discomfort in this context and 'a lack of control'? What are the inconsistencies in our responses to 'nature' in our locality and the reasons behind such contradictions?

And what is it about ourselves that is or begins to be revealed by the encroachment of outsiders in our midst? A few suggestions in answer to this have become evident from our research.

- Fear of disregard of individual territory
- Fear of a disregard of manners and protocols
- Fear of an implicit erosion of boundaries
- Fear of disruption of our own patterns of behaviour
- Fear of those setting up of residence, without our permission
- Fear of aural disturbance
- Fear of damage to property
- The anxiety regarding pets and children
- The anxiety regarding the possible spread of disease
- And concerns regarding possible other, associated pest infestations

Our initial research was completed in the autumn of 2007. Phase 2 research is ongoing.

Our work in Lancaster stemmed from our awareness of the wide range of responses to 'wildlife' as it is encountered within urban environments by city dwellers. Long ago, settlements and therefore latterly, cities were predicated on the concept of refuge and a physical division of culture and nature. Clearly such division has proved increasingly porous as more and more animals and birds consider concentrations of human population an attraction rather than a deterrent because of the opportunities such culture provides in terms of habitat and feeding. For some, the presence of these creatures – pigeons, starlings, rats, mice, foxes, and all manner of insects is a threat of some kind, a kind of leakage and therefore a representation of the fragility of our insulation from the 'wild', the unpredictability and 'chaos' of 'nature'. For others, the enfolding of human and animal habitats is a source of pleasure and fascination. For many others again, there may be little conscious

awareness until their personal boundaries are impinged upon.

Our initial research, (now completed) was conducted during August and September 2007.

Our plan in Lancaster in the early stages was to work with a number of local individuals and associations, in order to identify key spaces of encounter and issues specific to human environments in and around Lancaster. In order to have some insight into specific perceptions and limits of tolerance and 'animal infringement' we were keen to establish a working relationship with those, undertaking pest control in and around the city. The Pest Control Office, operating within the Environmental Health Department for Lancaster City Council has been generous in their assistance during the research stages of the project.

As artists we should say a little about how we undertake this kind of work – in fact how research-based art practice functions for us in the generation of ideas and artwork. We first began working in this way during an Arts Council International Fellowship Residency in Melbourne Australia in 2002. During our 2 month stay we ended up interviewing a number of people whose lives were embroiled or had become bound up with the history, myth and current perspectives on the Tasmanian Tiger. By interviewing a number of people each of whom had a different stake in this supposedly-extinct creature, we were able to generate a picture of the animal without invoking its physical representation – that is, we focused not on the animal, extinct or otherwise, but instead on its significance to a human community, itself shaped by the absent animal's continued resonance.

In the Lancaster project we acquainted ourselves with a number of instances of animal/human encounters and by so doing, we've been building a picture of local human behaviour towards animals and the environment – of tolerance and intolerance, of fear and loathing, affection, conflict, pathos, admiration ... We are thus being made aware of correspondences between our attitudes towards animals on the one hand and actually, to society's attitudes more generally and revealingly, to **the other**, including types of human communities both remote and closer to home.

What is conspicuously at play here is a continual conflict over territory. During our research we've observed ambivalence and contradictory vested interests in relation to a wide range of creatures. Most significant to us is this mixture of responses, the paradoxical nature of human attitudes towards agents of 'the wild', and the implicit cohesion-in-tension of the human/nature



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Uncertainty in the City, 2008 ©

paradigm.

So we wonder if the paradoxical intertwining of detached fascination on the one hand and neurotic repugnance on the other, is the inescapable architecture of an irreconcilable tension? And in the final analysis, might this irreconcilability hinge on our own ambivalence to the animal in us?

In the Lancaster project we are conscious that instead of working from within the home as we did in (a)fly* and foregrounding a 'controlled' and desired symbiosis, the space of encounter here is a marginal one, a liminal area that is host to encroachments each way and exemplified in areas of overlap. If the urban garden is the area where such contention might be experienced, we felt we'd do well to focus here... The garden, especially one that is used regularly as a kind of extension to the house, can be regarded as the epidermis – our way of sensing, touching and experiencing an environment of which some elements are controllable whilst others are clearly not.

We may mow the lawn and weed the borders but things beyond our control continually arrive and depart, through hedges and fences, surface

of the soil and grass and by air, inhabit or visit the trees and flowers. Some will be welcome, some not and some will be a source of vexation and perplexity. In an unthinking way, what perplexes or bothers us, we'd all too often just as soon be without. For this reason, we thought – who better to call on than the Pest Control Department?

As we've said, in Lancaster and Morecambe City Council, the Pest Control Department is a division of the Environmental Health Agency. When we approached them initially in August last year with these thoughts in mind, we interviewed chief Pest Control Officer, Susan Clowes asking her a series of questions – the answers to which informed in part, the anxieties listed above.

She also told us that:- '...there is undoubtedly a dependency on institutions to deal with what in many ways is a local and domestic problem if a problem at all. Many callers are uptight about **any animal presence** in their homes and even in their gardens...' This Pest Control Department at least, in principle, is generally tolerant of other animal species and have stated they would never respond to suggestions to act against animals in their 'natural environments' It was the late

social anthropologist Mary Douglas - who famously made the observation that what any society designates as "dirt" is not fundamentally a category of material polluted by germs or microbes, but is a case of "matter out of place".

"Dirt is matter out of place" was an idea she framed in order to explain the extraordinary range of ways in which different societies distinguish between what is ritually "pure" and what is "defiling" or "polluted". Which may ultimately come down to the distinction between what is "sacred" and what "profane".

So, Pests, like 'Dirt' are thought to be so when they are encountered 'out of place' – the issue is, just what it is that's **in** and what's **out** of place, seems to be a matter of variable opinion, both **between** cultures and **within** those cultures. (During our research for instance, we've learned that in Germany it is technically illegal to kill moles. It can be done legally but a license must be applied for).

Part of what we do and continue to do in this project, is to examine the nature of representation and the pitfalls and obstacles that representation may put in the way of understanding. An increasing amount of television coverage, of the educationally-entertaining variety, has in recent years been devoted to the scrutiny of human-animal margins of the type described above. The model is now established where our TVs become a living room zoo – we're guided, by experts, from environment to environment and encouraged to gawp and wonder at the magical, 'secret' world of the animal that exists just outside our curtained window – literally, there on the bird table or padding over the trampoline at night. TV demands no warm clothing and no obligation from us to stand still long enough for an animal to reveal itself.

And this is another inference we can draw – attractive as these glimpses are, characteristically, we're happy to let the machine of the media do the work – to defer to the expert who will set up the shot, secrete the camera, who will interpret, explain – give us the back-story on this highly-edited and therefore constructed, sharp-eyed moving vision of fur and nervous curiosity.

The waiting is erased. We see the money shot. Not the hours of anticipation, the suspension of disbelief nor do we experience the real thrill of surprise at having days of fruitless persistence bear at last, the tiniest but most gratifying reward. So what do we want? We are after all, animal. Being us means, to some greater or lesser extent, being animal. Animals have proved their ingenuity and determination in finding their way into the citadel. So what do we want?

The media technology that appears to bring non-human animal 'worlds' closer to ours or to make their proximity so temptingly tangible – is the very agent that

sustains their parallel remoteness from us. They are secret and we expect them to remain that way because seemingly, intuitively to us, they have no place in the world we've designed for ourselves. To imagine otherwise suggests a great self-deception, spectacularly unravelled when for instance our pets practice lapses of propriety – when the cat brings a rodent into the house and begins to fling it about the room. Finding body parts in the soft furnishings and wiping blood from the wallpaper is a stark reminder of why we built the walls in the first place.

So interestingly, the invasive constructs we are presented with by experts and technicians, those people whose profession it is to do our looking for us, is so perfect, so intimate and complete that it bears almost no relation to our own actual experience of wild animals, a key characteristic of which are their fleeting and occasional incidences on the periphery of our vision.

So what to do with the paradox? Could it be that the issue only becomes an issue as such, when we attempt to generalise and that in fact a spectrum of all human behaviour accommodates all manner of human/animal proximities and symbioses – of indifference and antagonism? What part plays empathy? What part irrational or intuitive rejection of alterity. What part pragmatic and dispassionate exploitation? How do we reconcile the components of this schema?

At the heart of all such questions is the issue of contested space. Whether by accident, by gate-crashing, by symbiosis, by tolerance, invitation or by cultivation, all species encroach or are encroached upon by others. There is nothing unique in this. What makes humans (possibly) exceptional, is our obsession with analysis. In order to order and control our world we engage in the practice of definition – this in itself is a supremely graphic analogy of border control and manifests itself in ways that determine what is part of and what is apart from ourselves and our wishfully-delimited lives.

One thing seems certain and that is the more we seek to insulate ourselves from what is deemed the natural environment of creatures, traditionally the more we seem to resent their scratching at our doors and their encroachment in or on our spaces. So while we can acknowledge that other cultures have a different take on cohabitation, those more like our own, obsessed with making human environments exclusively human, don't take kindly to being reminded that it isn't just up to us.

The Works

The works in *Uncertainty in the City* will be twofold. First, a radio station will attempt to map the spectrum of opinion and response through personal accounts and



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson
 Uncertainty in the City, 2008 ©

#1 Radio Animal – This will be a local and on-line radio event where over a period of a day or series of days, a mobile broadcast unit, modified to our specifications, will be parked visibly in the centre of town and field vocal contributions from people of the City, regarding their experience of wild creatures, in their homes, gardens, in the parks – a mix of good and bad, the extraordinary, of anxiety, repugnance and delight. When considering the possibilities in setting this up, we were drawn conceptually to an illegal or pirate approach, simply because the impertinence of its encroachment mirrors the uninvited arrival of animal itinerants. Even a modest radio intervention done on this basis might have been a coup – questions arose regarding how could this be monitored and its effect documented? The extreme intolerance of the law regarding pirate radio stations suggests that this option would be problematic for us as citizens. Fortunately, much can be achieved by using webcasting and streaming live over the internet. The station will be a depository, a battery, a tool for knowledge and knowledge dissemination. It will be a

propaganda tool and simultaneously, a source of reassurance. Ultimately it sets out to be strategically pluralistic and unclassifiable in political terms – a bloodless animal revolution?

Having launched Radio Animal in Lancaster we will take it 'on the road', probably to field events in the area

#2 The Exhibition – This will comprise the final assemblage and exposition of the material accumulated in the research and the Radio Animal phases. An installation in spring/summer 2009 comprising audio and visual material at the (by then) newly-opened Storey Gallery that will include the unit and equipment utilized in Radio Animal together with documentation of its operation in Lancaster and at the other venues.



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson
 Uncertainty in the City, 2008 ©

Concluding thoughts

We tend to suppress our awareness of the degree to which we share space with other creatures. If we were to make a cross section of a house, imagine what multitudes we would find embedded in its fabric – and if we were to extend that to the garden, our sense of being ‘outnumbered’ would be profound.

The sense that is evident through all of this thinking corresponds with what’s implicit in artist Stan Bonnar’s essay, *Context and Provocation***. In this essay which uses a conceptualization of the urban pigeon to unravel the mediating effects of language on our experience of the world, it can be construed that the contestation of urban space between the humans and other species is akin to an overlaying of interests, to us (Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson) best articulated perhaps by an overlaying of maps of the same territory to denote respectively divergent land usage. The territory may comprise a ‘landscape’ made up of earth, rocks, concrete and cement edifices (cliffs), trees (lampposts, telegraph posts and wires), and some moveable or permeable borders – gates, doors, windows, hedges etc – but the

decisions and motivations regarding how that land and its furnishings are used, are predicated on entirely different ‘principles’ held or exercised respectively by ‘the non-human animal’ and by ourselves...

Significantly, also implicit in Bonnar’s essay is the oneness of animal and its environment – how the two concepts are inextricably bound up in the animal’s existence, survival and procreation...

Despite paradoxically and destructively having grown to imagine ourselves as being fundamentally independent of environment, (intellectually at least, unrooted) the social-human concept of place is nevertheless of instinctive importance. The wild animal seems to oppose and ‘impudently’ ignore our ‘defenses’, regarding urban land instead as continuous space – either making use of it or passing through it.

It is probably the unresolved and complex paradox intrinsic to our intellectual and instinctive attitudes that causes so much anxiety and irrationality of response when our spatial borders are tested by whatever ‘invader’.

These matters are made much more complex and fascinating by the ambivalence of human response. In

several cases in Lancaster, we have both witnessed and been told of cases where neighbours are in contention over the presence of specific groups of animals in their shared or adjoining gardens or house frontage. Some were pleased when bats took up residence in a roof space and others panicked. Insects in and around the garden are problematic for many whilst for one man in Lancaster, the presence of over 200 species of moth in his garden has been a source of utter fascination and provided a subject for a remarkable photographic archive. Some will feed foxes in one garden whilst the next door neighbours will put out poison for them. Some feed the birds whilst others worry that this will attract 'vermin'.

In addition to wildlife enthusiasts and special interest groups, individual residents in the region have been key to our research – a case in point is the gentleman we interviewed on a local housing estate who feeds the pigeons on a spectacularly generous (or antisocial) level, pouring out sackfuls of mixed corn for them onto the street just beyond his gate at regular times, twice daily. As a consequence his home has been a constant target of attack by his neighbours. It's a response that may in some respects be understandable, but all the windows in his house are boarded up, for the simple reason that they have repeatedly been broken. He lives in darkness but continues to champion and support a species that he considers to be both maligned and the subject of systemic abuse.



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Uncertainty in the City, 2008 ©

***(a)fly** – Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, Reykjavík International Arts festival 2006 – see artists' website www.snæbjörnsdóttir/wilson.com

**** Context and Provocation**, Stan Bonnar, Decadence, ed. David Harding and Pavel Büchler, Foulis Press, 1997

DISCUSSING UNCERTAINTY IN THE CITY

*We met with Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson to discuss the project.
Questions by **Giovannni Aloï***

Your new project, *Uncertainty in the City*, focuses on those animals that reside or nudge at the borders of our homes, those about whose presence we are ambivalent and over whose comings and goings we have a limited degree of control. How much of this project is related to *(a)fly*, your domestic investigation of 2006 and how different do you think it is from *nanoq*?

We consider it a complement to *(a)fly* – a companion piece, though in very broad terms only. *(a)fly* was made in Iceland in 2006 and the site-specificity of that work shouldn't be overlooked, but in that project we used ptarmigan hunters, with shotguns, to identify (by shooting at maps) specific locations in downtown Reykjavik – residencies where we might (or might not) find pets and their keepers. It was the habitats of pets within their homes (not the pets themselves) that we subsequently photographed, as a means by which to examine the nature of the relationship between humans and companion species. In the current project we've moved from the heart of the home to the periphery – the wall cavities, the roof spaces, the broken mortar and to the gardens, to examine another hidden society, living in our midst – and to consider this society simultaneously in two ways – as an unselfconscious community of fauna going about its disparate business in and around our homes – and on the other hand as an incongruous and contradictory human construct commanding and combining *in tension*, as wide and

disparate a range of responses as there may be species.

In *nanoq* we worked with stuffed polar bears and allowed the audience to engage with a number of specimens simultaneously within a warehouse/gallery space. This could be seen as a bizarre invitation for the audience to engage with 'something of the wild' by means of an encounter with hollow animal bodies. The difference from *Uncertainty in the City* is that here, the wild encroaches on 'human territory' uninvited. In *nanoq*, the audience conversely, was invited to enter this prepared space where polar bears had been rendered docile, moulded into forms in which they could be observed, admired, pitied and even respected, but without any inconvenience or danger.

Whilst researching for *Uncertainty in the City*, we heard the story of a woman who had befriended a squirrel by feeding it regularly from her kitchen window. Gradually the squirrel became increasingly demanding of food, ultimately bringing along others of its kind and thereby prompting a fateful shift in their relationship. A once-endearing and charming visitor had become an inconvenient and to her mind, a terrorising pest. After several unsuccessful attempts to deter the squirrel from the window to which it had been enticed and at which it had come to expect food, a final solution was hatched by the Pest Control agent and the animal was shot.

In this story, surprisingly, there is a parallel with that of polar bears visiting human settlements in Manitoba for instance and which once identified as regular 'offenders' having to be dealt with by extreme measures



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson
Dyri, from 'A Fly', 2006 ©

Why pests?

In fact for the project we're not only looking at pests but all manner of human animal/non human animal relations. But pests are very interesting to us and have provided an important focus for this project. Because we're interested in ideas of intrusion and tolerance, attraction and repulsion and most importantly of all, the margins where encounters occur, we find the concept of pest – as an embodiment of something *out of place* – tantalising and compelling. A sense of mischief in us perhaps, which some may regard as disingenuous, is stimulated by the unease of 'hosts', whose homes some animals just want to make *their* home. One prevailing interest we have is in human fear and in the presence of the pest a spectrum of fearful responses is uncovered, in some cases to do

with health, but often to do with irrational and unjustifiable neuroses.

As well travelled artists you have had the opportunity to encounter and deal with a number of different institutions. How was it to work with the Pest Control Office operating within the Environmental Health Department for Lancaster City Council?

Very revealing. (A delight) Enlightening in many ways – and we've been taken on with a great deal of generosity and good will. The team consists of four guys, all of whom have a real interest, knowledge and regard for other species. The chief operative, has a great backlog of

anecdotes relating to his experience in the field and he is generous in sharing these and speculating on the reasons for human behaviour in respect of the opportunism of animals within built environments. As we've said, the Department is (in principle) liberal in its attitudes towards other species but still carries out the exterminations and eradications one would expect from any pest control service. The intelligence of their approach means that they will do only what is necessary, where necessary to remove the offending nest and its occupants from the locus of contact or potential contact. We've been out on a number of missions with the team, investigating and dealing amongst others, with rats, wasps, ants, pigeons, moles and people.

What is the set of criteria involved in the identification of pests against more welcome beings?

In our experience the criteria are subjective much of the time. They are formed around often-irrational anxieties or affections. Interestingly we've heard tales of *shifting* perceptions, where sustained contact has led to a change in attitude either way. The squirrel story is one such example. Early on in our research we accompanied the Pest Control team on a visit where the 'problem' was the presence of moles in a well-kept garden on the outskirts of the city. In a previous visit, a number of tunnels had been located and traps laid in an attempt to catch the mole(s) that were causing damage to the manicured lawn. On the morning of our visit, when a mole was found caught in one trap, it was released from the trap and thrown into the nearby bushes. While this was going on, the owner who had once been an army officer, was recounting how to make trousers from moleskins. In this moment we experienced what Donna Haraway refers to as 'parallel worlds'. Shortly before this, we had been in Germany for Documenta 12 in Kassel. Martha Rosler's photographic work from this exhibition, focusing on molehills, sprang to mind. In Germany moles are a protected species. Looking at the dead, discarded mole in amongst the bushes in Lancaster and at the empty traps being dug anew into the open ground one couldn't help thinking about the construction of geographical borders and territories and their bearing on the fates of non-human animals.

The project, currently a work in progress, involves the building of a picture of local human behaviour towards animals and the environment and revolves around the 'urban garden'. Why did you focus on this specific space?

We see the garden as a liminal zone where an extension to the house is cultivated as a surrogate piece of countryside – a 'natural' environment where the presence of other species is respectively invited, tolerated or enjoyed but where there is also an acceptance that *unwelcome* visitors will encroach. As such, it's the patch where the selection process is carried out either notionally or in practice and where the envisaging of some kind of utopia is exercised. It's also a place where the domestic animal will encounter its wild cousins so that the observable interactions are between different types of species – those with access to the inner human habitat on the one hand and those excluded from it. In the garden they all have the possibility of meeting. Actually within the garden it can be argued that some species are permanently in residence and that the human being, is a temporary or itinerant visitor.

Which are the pests that people seem to find more disturbing than others? Why?

The imaginary ones. Most pests that are 'disturbing' exist in that way in the mind rather than as some incontestable reality. The constructs we form around individual animals or species have the effect of blinding us to the otherwise observable creature and our more prosaic encounters with it. In our minds, an ant becomes the *bite* or *sting* of an ant and its physical being and mobility, the vehicle for the transportation of the bite to our flesh. The rat is a *bigger* bite with a long tail – where the ant can move imperceptibly in order to administer its bite, the bite of the rat carries with it, unspeakable disease and infections. To us, bees and wasps, in the proximity of, or worse, *within* the fabric of our home, are the *nearness of their sting*. A colony is a mass of stings and the threat of pain and of allergic reaction that may in some circumstances kill. What's happening here is that a pest is so defined by its capacity to irritate us, infest our home, erode the fabric of our building, pierce our flesh, hurt and infect us. These potentials are embodied in our mental representations of the respective animals and outweigh by far, any more measured considerations of the creature as an independent entity.

What is the most unusual instance you have encountered through the research stages of the project?

This is the discovery, courtesy of the Pest Control Department, of the rather unusual urban animal or 'pest' that has been given the name 'cable bug'. Victims report symptoms of itchy legs and the presence of small red marks, seemingly identical to those of some biting



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Uncertainty in the City, 2008 ©

insects – the typical environment was the urban office, usually an office environment with a combination of a battery of computers and artificial carpet material.

People moving around in an office environment are usually surrounded by lots of electrical equipment. Add to this the material of the carpeting (often synthetic) and the abundance of metal-framed desks, chairs and cabinets. As a consequence, the individual builds up a static charge on their body through actions such as shuffling along the carpet. They then move to a metal-framed cupboard or sit at a metal-framed desk. The result of this close contact is that a charge of static electricity arcs across from the person to the desk or vice-versa. This 'zap' or 'belt' of static feels just like an insect bite – a characteristic 'sharp' sensation, followed by itching and discomfort. Inspection of the 'bite' will often reveal the typical signs a raised redness of the skin, and even a pale white centre at the site of the 'bite'. But, there is no puncture mark (ie: no hole where biting or piercing mouthparts have broken the skin).

The officer who told us about this phenomenon was keen to steer the subject away from the virtual – back to the actual instances of animals they deal with. For us however, the comparison was intriguing. The cable bug is the perfect pest, combining all the requisite irritating or vexing qualities without any actual territorial or bodily invasion and without necessitating the production of a carcass as a consequence of its eradication...

The exhibition will open at the Storey Gallery who has also commissioned the work. How much input have they had in the project?

We have worked very closely with the Storey Gallery. They have helped find communities for us to work with and to advise and continue to assist in help with the planning of the proposed events and execution of the work.

What will the exhibition include?



Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson

Uncertainty in the City, Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson, 2008 ©

Material relating to the research and the processes of the project.

What is your favourite pest at this stage?

All will be revealed in good time but certainly, the pest we have in mind will have a presence at the exhibition.

Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson – a collaborative, research-based and socially-engaged art practice whose projects explore issues of history, culture and environment in relation to both humans and non-human animals. They use installation, text, photographic and video-based media

*Milestones: Installations: **Big Mouth** Tramway, Glasgow 2004; **nanoq: flat out and bluesome**, assorted related exhibitions and venues Bristol, London, Oxford, Reykjavík, Copenhagen, Oslo, Cambridge and Melbourne, 2004 – 2008; **(a)fly**, Reykjavík Arts Festival, 2006.*

*Books: **Big Mouth**, pub. Tramway, Glasgow 2004; **(a)fly**, pub. National Museum of Iceland 2006; **nanoq: flat out and bluesome**, pub. Black Dog Publishing, London 2006*

***Uncertainty in the City**, a major commission for the Storey Gallery, Lancaster 2008/9 on responses to urban wildlife.*

***Seal**, a visual art project that explores human relationships to the seal, an animal widely appropriated in Western culture for a variety of human representations and emotions. To be exhibited at the Pod Space Gallery, Newcastle, Australia for the Minding Animals Conference in July 2009.*

Further reading

www.snaebjornsdottirwilson.com

Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson were interviewed by Antennae in Autumn 2008 ©

BEAUTIFUL ANIMALS IN HUNTING WONDERLAND

Animal trophy hunting occupies a complex and ambiguous position in contemporary hunting discourse. To some it is an avatar of colonial practises, to others it is a lucrative niche market in the tourist industry. What is certain is that trophy hunting has evolved a unique visual rhetoric in the form of artists' paintings and hunters' photographic records, which together constitute a historical narrative of animal thanatology and corporeality.

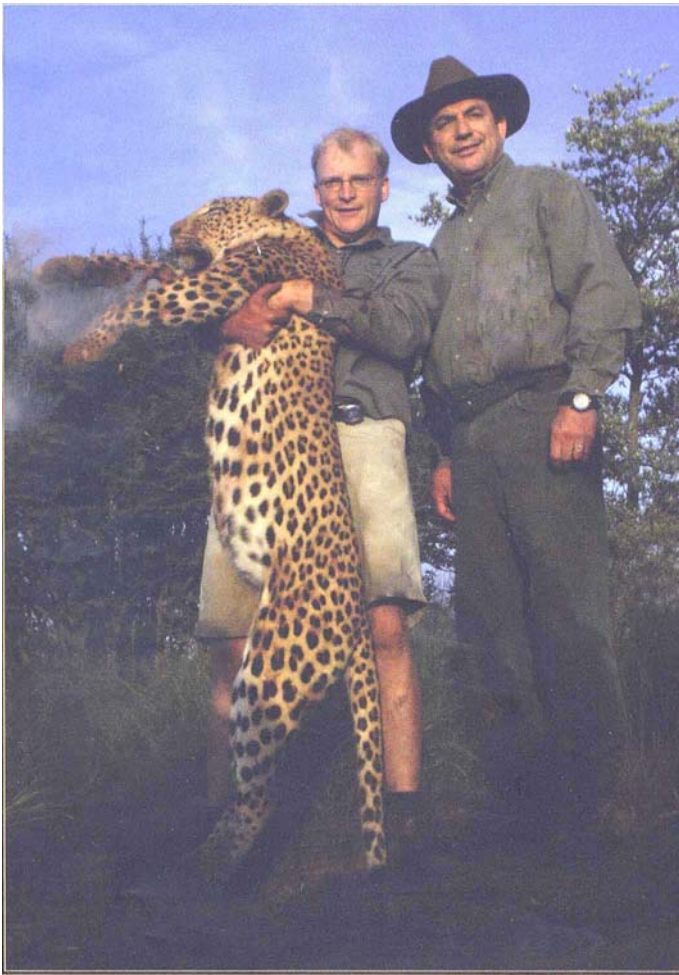
Text by Sonja Britz

The socio-cultural rituals of animal death and their visual representation were historically allied to notions of immortality and beauty. According to Jonathan Burt, such representations have 'unique potency'ⁱ: a potency enhanced by apposite readings which can be applied to the beauty of the dead animal. The selected animal is an object of beauty to the trophy hunter, evokes mixed reactions of adulation and horror from the anti-hunting fraternity and can be transformed into an aesthetic expression of painterly surface and animal suffering by the artist.

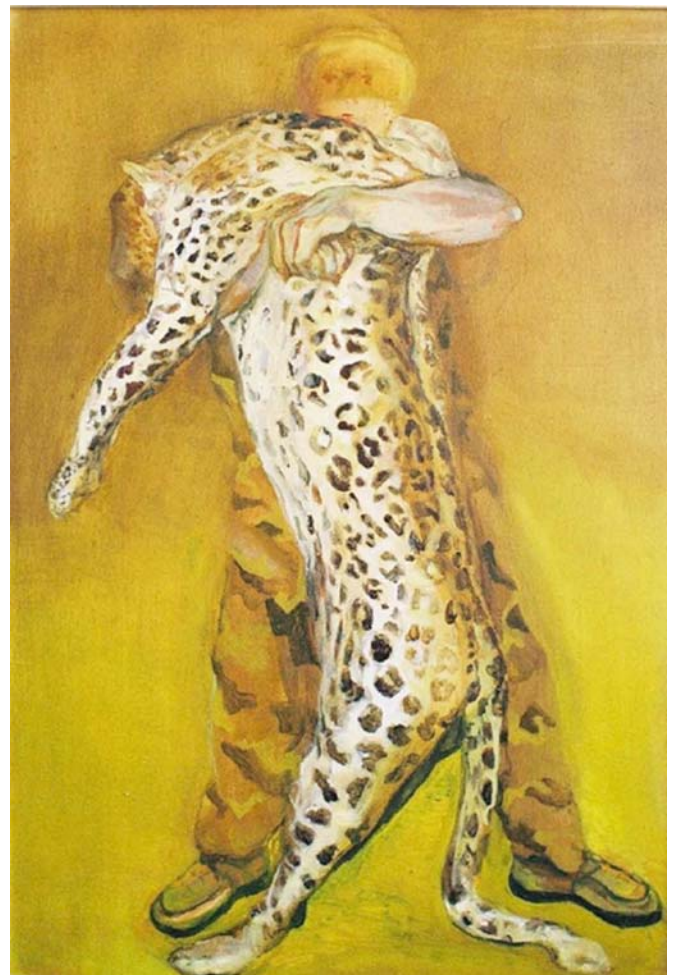
Trophy documentation of so called *problem* animals, such as roaming predators, usually entails their being displayed in an undignified manner, for example stacked or strung up. By contrast, the trophy animals under discussion have a different status: these animals are confined to specific areas and, though usually less common than problem animals, are not endangered, in fact their hunting is sanctioned by CITESⁱⁱ. In these photographic records trophy animals are individually posed and photographed in close physical contact with the hunter. The photographs also reveal species specific conventions of display. The leopard, for example, is always held from behind by the hunter in a macabre, erotic embrace – a veritable dance of death. The lion is usually displayed as *resting* with forepaws stretched out at the feet of the hunter- the powerful beast brought to submission.

An investigation into the representation of hunting practices reveals both the myths and frailties of this pursuit. The etymological roots of *trophy* can be traced to Classical antiquity when it referred to a structure erected as a memorial of martial victory, which was dedicated to a deity and usually displayed in public. Thus the act of making victory visible is central to the celebratory nature of the trophy memorial. From the viewpoint of the victor value and skill were required and the trophy itself had to be of a special nature – valuable, unique or beautiful - something to be prized for some reason or another. The concept was transferred to hunting from 1513 onwards.ⁱⁱⁱ

Hunting defined as sport, or leisure activity is not a utilitarian exercise, but embedded in social, cultural and political practices or contexts. It is a physical ritual which has a mythical dimension; the narrative is a mixture of popular ideas that combine fiction and natural phenomena. The perception held by some contemporary hunting fraternities that hunting can be viewed as an a-historical, a-cultural practice, is based on the belief that trophy hunting is an ancient human yearning not necessarily connected with the procurement of food. Recent writings on the subject, for example by authors such as Chris Wilbert, Garry Marvin and Diana Donald, deconstruct the complex discourses underlying the representation of the hunt. The hunters are snared in a set of binary contradictions for they emotionally venerate the animal whilst simultaneously engaging in its physical destruction.



'Sporting people' 2008. Leopard hunt. African Sporting Gazette. Volume 14(1) ©



Sonja Britz
Man and Leopard, Oil on Canvas, 60 x 90, 2007 ©

However, such a death can be called a *celebrated death*, at least from the viewpoint of the hunter. Embedded in the hunting ritual is the notion that the animal cannot be inferior, but instead must be worthy of an emotional and physical engagement with the hunter: it has to be a 'special' animal. For this purpose the hunter also has to decide on the appropriate attire for, and approach to, the hunt. Representation is central to the success of sustaining the hunting myth as it is important to commemorate the kill. Western art history reveals contains a series of tropes associated with the depiction of dead animals. In seventeenth and eighteenth century European painting the *gamepiece* consisted of a display of dead, or dying hunted animals usually associated with privileged aristocratic hunting practices. These paintings celebrated both the prowess of the hunter and the 'beauty' of the trophy. *Gamepieces* were often highly decorative displays of

dead animals, hunting equipment and hunting dogs in an outdoor setting, and thus removed from the domestication of earlier *food paintings* which according to Kalof^{iv} illustrated the commodification of agricultural produce. The *gamepiece* emphasized the aesthetic aspects of killed animals as well as the status and privilege of the hunter in a time when food was not abundant.

In the nineteenth century a new form of hunting emerged which drew hunters to previously unexplored regions in search of abundant, exotic prey and glory. Continents such as Africa - rich in fauna and flora - became important geographical areas to observe and collect animal specimens in the name of scientific exploration and education. Imperial narratives of domination and power of course fuelled these expeditions, and their numbers exponentially increased



Jean-Baptiste Oudry
Dead Wolf, Oil on Canvas, Wallace Collection, London, 61 x 81 1721, ©

as the century progressed. These bloody narratives assumed a more subtle form in the early twentieth century when the pioneering taxidermist Carl Akeley began African expeditions to collect specimens for the American Natural History Museum and unwittingly established a narrative prototype for safari tourism. President Theodore Roosevelt's vision to conjoin the 'hidden spirit of nature' with the history of civilization' ^v led him to sponsor and participate in Akeley's expeditions; at the time these were justified in the name of science, conservation and posterity, but today seem fuelled by Roosevelt's passion for adventure and glory. This narrative was reinforced by prevailing American ideals of manhood and the preservation of 'heritage' ^{vi} These expeditions also played an important role in perpetuating the American 'hunting myth' as set out in Roosevelt's multi-volume history, *The Winning of the West 1889* ^{vii} (which proclaims man as the hunter and

and contains spiritual truths about manhood).

In his 1965 book *End of the Game* Peter Beard presented the photographic documentation of these hunters with their trophies. His account is a poignant testimony to the decimation of the African continent's animals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The hunters of this era indulged in killing sprees that seem unbelievable today. Their photographic records reveal narratives of heroism, technological superiority and masculinity, which stand in strong contrast to the vulnerability of the animal. Beard's work marked the emergence of the slow realisation that Africa's wildlife was disappearing.

A decade later Susan Sontag noted that 'one situation where people are switching from bullets to film is the photographic safari that is replacing the gun safari in East Africa' ^{viii} and 'guns have metamorphosed into cameras in this earnest comedy, the ecology safari,



Peter Beard

Theodore Roosevelt on hunting expeditions (late 19th century) from *End of the Game*, first published 1963.

because nature has ceased to be what it always has been – what people needed protection from. Now nature – tamed, endangered, mortal – needs to be protected from people. When we are afraid, we shoot. But when we are nostalgic, we take pictures.^{ix}

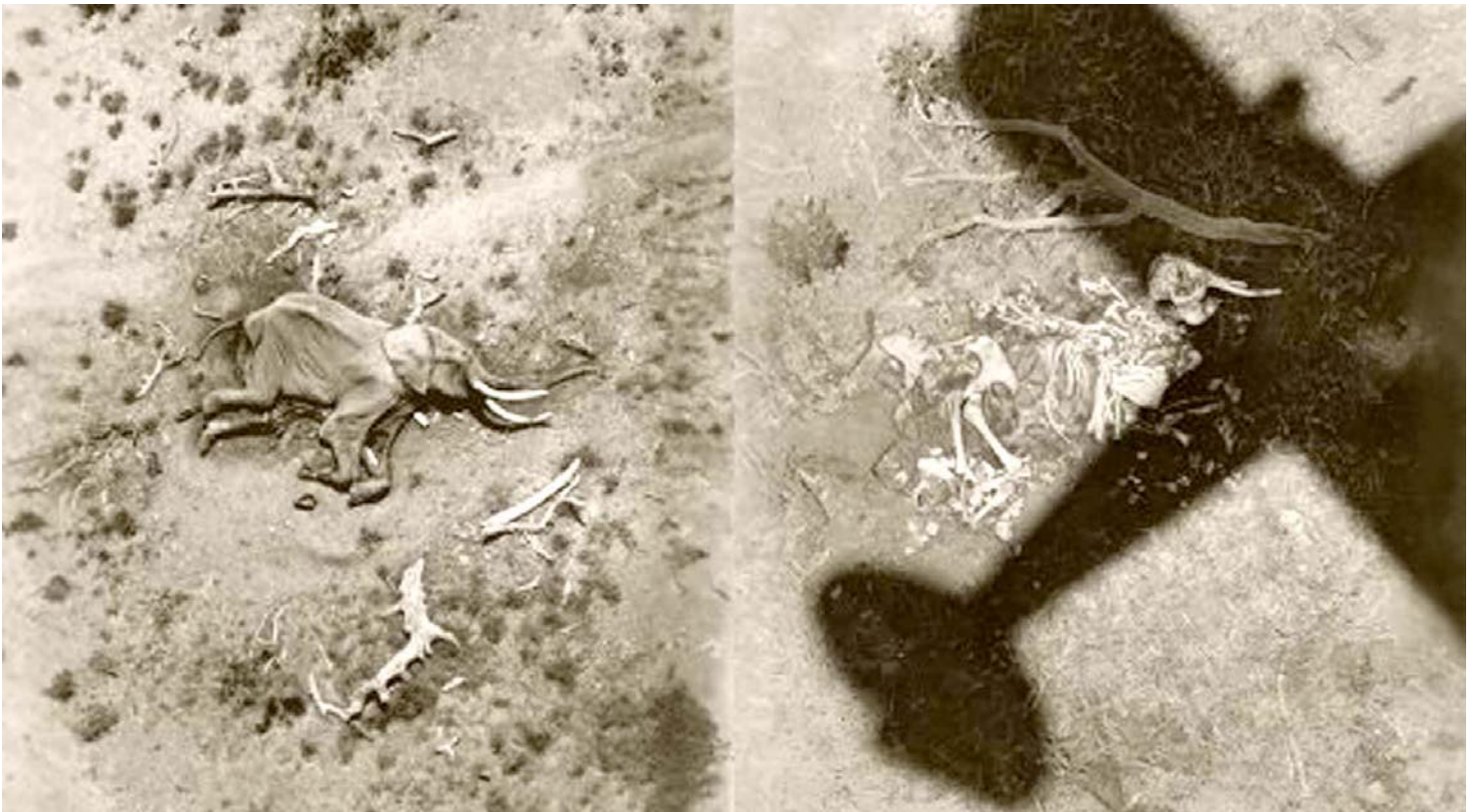
It is at first disconcerting that photographic conventions collected by Beard that originated in the nineteenth century ago still form the basis for tropes of representation in present day hunting magazines. Supposedly post-colonial hunting photographs still usually depict male hunters, attendants and weapons with the dead animal. Also largely unchanged are the various modes of display for the trophy. The hunter is often posed behind the animal, or sitting on top of it and of course, these tropes foreground the size and beauty of the animal proclaiming thereby the hunter's powers of selection.

However whereas in some historical instances the hunter is irreverently posed on top of the animal – even on a bicycle, today this obvious 'lack of respect' is rare. Instead a similarity can be detected in the representation and manner of display of hunter and trophy. As noted earlier there are contemporary,

specie-specific conventions of representation. For example, the leopard is usually held in an upright position by the straining hunter, so that its pelt is clearly visible. A single spotlight, provided by a hunting torch, illuminates the otherwise darkened stage as leopard and hunter are captured together in their *dance macabre*. The lion (preferably male) is displayed in prostate position with much emphasis on the head. The lion's head is an iconic sign also in the corporate world where it often appears as a logo. Bucks are usually posed so that their horns are displayed to best advantage. In each case the photographic composition strives to display the 'beauty' of the animal to its best advantage. Trophy hunting is a projective, rather than a spontaneous enterprise. Contemporary hunting safari websites warn the hunter about the importance of applying for licenses to hunt before embarking on a hunting safari. Although hunting activities are characterized by rules and regulations, there is also a perceived lack of control with regard to the success of the hunt in legal hunting, (unlike canned hunting where the hunter is guaranteed his trophy).

Dress code plays an important part. In a sense the hunter seeks immersion in the hunting experience. His/her clothes can be a form of disguise allowing the hunter to blend in with the environment which hopefully allows proximity to the particular animal chosen for the hunt. This connectivity imposed by the hunter onto the hunted is the trigger which leads to the desire for documentation – and by extension possession. However this immersion via clothing takes on bizarre twists and turns in contemporary hunting narratives. Military associations are evoked by the mottled pattern of greens and browns which serve to blend the hunters into their surroundings. Headgear varies between military style forage caps and nostalgic, Ralph Lauren retro-safari style with leopard skin hat bands that evince a longing for the colonial past.

Photographic *representations* of trophies have another significant difference from the final mounted head, horns, or other taxidermied records of dead animals. In the photograph the animal will still be warm, achingly beautiful as it is posed with the hunter. These photographs of necessity capture a moment shortly after death before the animal is eviscerated – the first stage in the formal preparation/preservation of the trophy. In this interim period hunter and trophy exist in a liminal state which is ephemeral and as a result, the need for documentation is even greater. Different from human corpses, it is permitted that the hunter is in close, intimate proximity with the dead animal. The taboos regarding distance which exist in relationship to human death do not exist here. Perhaps because animal death is perceived as being free from cultural engagement. As a result a strange bond or kinship is established between



Peter Beard

Untitled. (late 19th century) from End of the Game, first published 1963 ©
Nor dread nor hope attend. from End of the Game, first published 1963 ©



Sonja Britz
Dance Macabre, Oil on Canvas, 90 x 120, 2008 ©

the hunter and the dead animal- albeit only from the side of the hunter. Can it be seen as a Deleuzian desire to “become animal”?^x

The trophy which originally represented the hunter’s prowess ironically becomes his burden through the mock embrace between hunter and trophy. Much is made in these photographs of ‘showing off’ the hunter’s strength in his bearing of the animal: simultaneously the hunter’s struggle to keep the dead animal upright testifies to the size of the animal and by association the beauty and uniqueness of the dead animal: trophy animals are by definition special kinds of animals and often an animal in its prime.

In the above respects there are many similarities between colonial hunting photographs and contemporary images. However contemporary images of hunters and their trophies found on the readers’ photographs pages of hunting magazines are almost visually indistinguishable from one another. It seems that their value resides in this similarity – both as representations of individual members of a hunting fraternity and record of a shared experience which reinstates the human/animal combat myth.

The moment of killing is rarely recorded photographically for at this instant all attention is directed on the hunter composing the animal in the crosshairs of a gunsight. When the kill has been made a new, and very different, composition is made in the camera viewfinder. Great care is taken to pose hunter and victim as an intimate pair, sometimes with and sometimes without partners or attendants. Women and children are featured as part of the hunting experience, sometimes en familia, sometimes alone. The weapon is sometimes though not always present- almost as if the hunter wanted to point out his/her kinship with the animal in death with violence in absentia. Sometimes the hunter is accompanied by an aide- in colonial photographs this aide was often photographed on his own supporting the trophy, thereby objectifying both the animal and the attendant.

But here there is a sensual/sexual aspect to the hunt - not only in the socially permitted, bonding between hunter and aid but also between human and animal. The relationship between hunting and eroticism has a long history in that the hunt was associated with conquest in love. Accentuated by the beauty of the animal’s corporeality the pose also denotes an embrace.

The hunter’s gaze usually confronts the viewer whereas the animals eyes are closed in death. Despite the fact that the posed photograph tries to hide or de-emphasize the animal’s deadness, it remains abject. The hunter’s gaze forces the viewer into a kind of complicity with the act and the scene represented. Without this

interaction between viewer and subject the photograph will have little meaning. The animal seemingly occupies a state between life and death –a liminal state from which neither viewer nor posed subject can escape.

Visual images thus play a central role in sustaining the hunting myth – through manipulation of the spectators’ emotions they are drawn into the mindset of the hunter and asked to view a visual representation of suffering without taking the animal subject into consideration. By using these photographic records as the starting point for my paintings I have tried to portray what Wolheim described as, ‘the spectator

within’^{xi} This person is a possible protagonist whose experience of the scene is total and not limited to one viewpoint, as in the case of the external spectator. Who else but the photographer can fulfil this role? In *Camera Lucida* Roland Barthes described photographers as unwitting ‘agents of Death’^{xii}, whereas the hunter’s photographer is Death’s active accomplice. Being privy both to the killing, which has remained hidden, and the documentation of the prize, the photographer has an identifiable repertoire which the external spectator can easily access. The internal spectator is not a disembodied eye, but someone who has participated in the hunt and kill, possibly as a tracker or gunbearer, and who now holds the camera and hunting torch. The external viewer is therefore allowed into this distinctive experience which leads to total immersion as now the experience is one of greater emotional engagement and complexity: the external viewer is engaged on perceptual and affective levels, but can never become the spectator in the picture.

ⁱ Burt cited in Donald 2006:53

ⁱⁱ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

ⁱⁱⁱ SOED

^{iv} Kalof (2007: 79

^v Haraway 1984-85:22

^{vi} Haraway 1984-85:38

^{vii} Herman 2007:47

^{viii} 1977:115

^{ix} Sontag 1977:15

^x 2004:267-268

^{xi} 1987:102

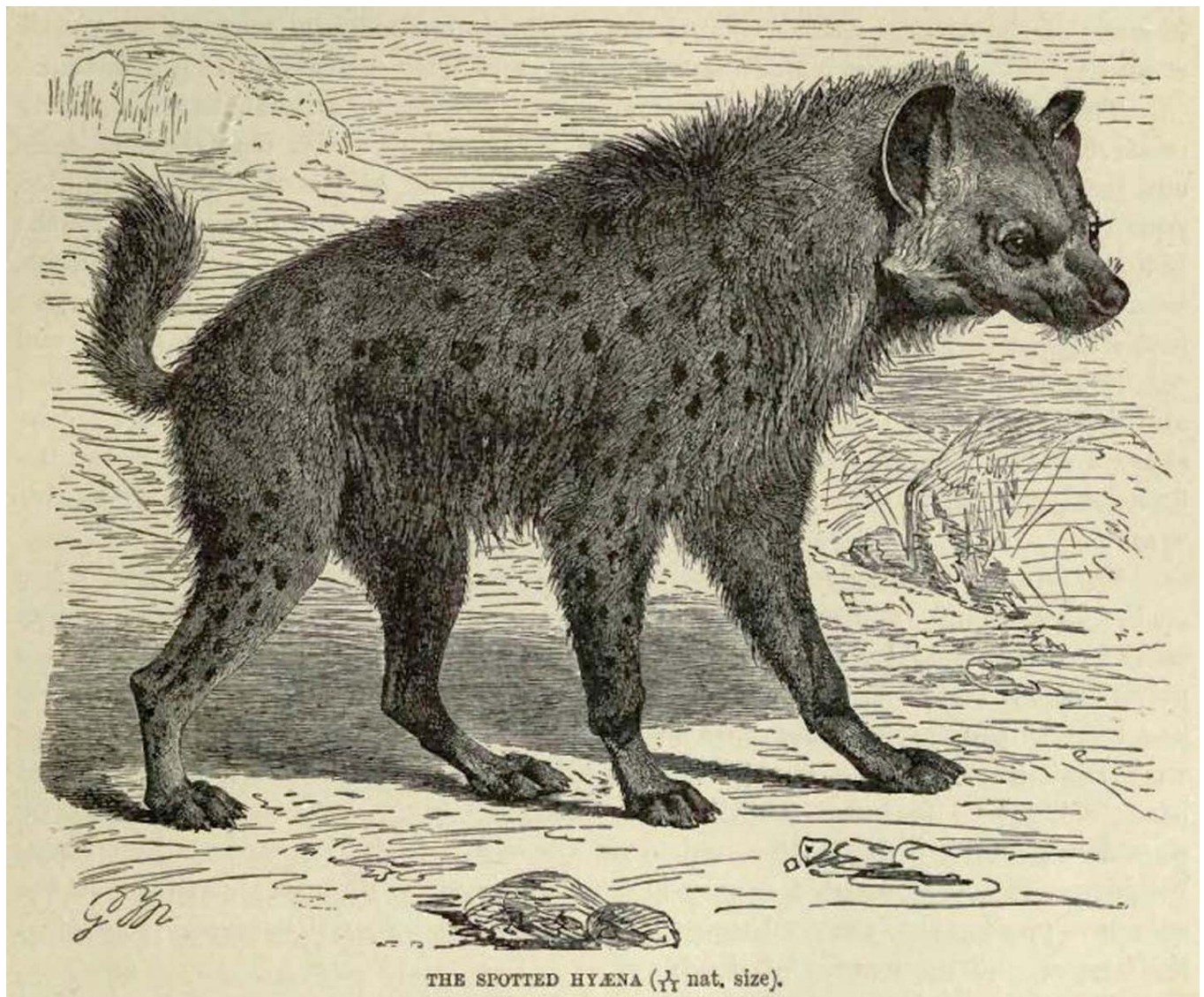
^{xii} Barthes,1993:92

Sonja Britz was born in 1955 in Durban, South Africa. A practicing artist, she hold a Masters Degree in Fine Art from the University of Natal. Her proposal for a PhD in Fine Art has recently been accepted by the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Sonja currently lives in Johannesburg , where she also lectures at the College of Design- Design Center- in Johannesburg. She has had numerous personal shows, the most recent being November 2006 at Gordart in Johannesburg.

PREDATORY INTELLIGENCE

*There is little to admire about the spotted hyena (*Crocota crocuta*). They are smelly, ungainly creatures that rip their prey limb-from-limb as their high-pitched laughter fills the African night.*

*Text by **Brian Switek***



Lydekker, R. (1983)

The Spotted Hyena, The Royal Natural History, Vol. 1 Frederick Warne & Co. London, 1893 ©

Lions and leopards may kill quickly, and the grace of a cheetah in pursuit of its prey is astonishing, but death in the jaws of a hyena is a more brutal affair. The hyena's preference for hunting at night does not help this reputation.

For many cultures, night is a time when evil reigns, and those that are active after twilight are surely up to no good. Indeed, hyenas confirm this suspicion for they have been said to disinter the bodies of the dead from their graves under the cover of darkness, which goes beyond questionable habits into the realm of taboo. These activities have caused hyenas to become associated with witches. The Kaguru of Tanzania, for instance, believe that witches embrace hyenas during flight, the carnivore shooting fire from its anus as the unholy pair streak across the dark sky.

Even the living have much to fear from hyenas. According to the folklore of the nomadic Bedouin people, hyenas target humans walking alone at night. The predators lull their victims into a trance by wafting the scent of their anal glands upon them, and the victim is led back to a cave to be devoured. Some have claimed to have survived such an ordeal, for if the victim survives until daybreak, the hyena's stinky spell breaks.

Even in the absence of such imaginative tales, hyenas are often depicted as a nuisance at best and a villain at worst. It is difficult to have much affection for a species in which females have a pseudo-penis through which they give birth, and that sometimes steals meals from the regal lions. (Lions also scavenge from hyenas, but that does not seem to have tarnished their reputation.) Science, however, has exposed details of the hyena's social life that reveals a more complex animal than the cultural caricatures.

Spotted hyenas are well-known for their unnerving laughter, but they have a much larger repertoire of about 12 different call types. Compared to their more solitary relatives, like the brown hyena (*Hyaena brunnea*), spotted hyenas vocalize more loudly and more frequently, which is essential to the way they hunt. Spotted hyenas are social predators, but it can be difficult to keep track of allies in the dark. Their calls help them coordinate with each other to take down prey or defend carcasses, but this is only one aspect of the hyena's gregariousness.

Mammals that live in complex societies, like some primates and spotted hyenas, are adept at appropriately responding to, anticipating, and even manipulating the behavior of other group members. For spotted hyenas, their female-dominated social groups are called clans, which vary in size from about 6 to 90 individuals. Dominance within the group depends on who is related

to whom and alliances, not how well any individual can fight, and it all begins at birth.

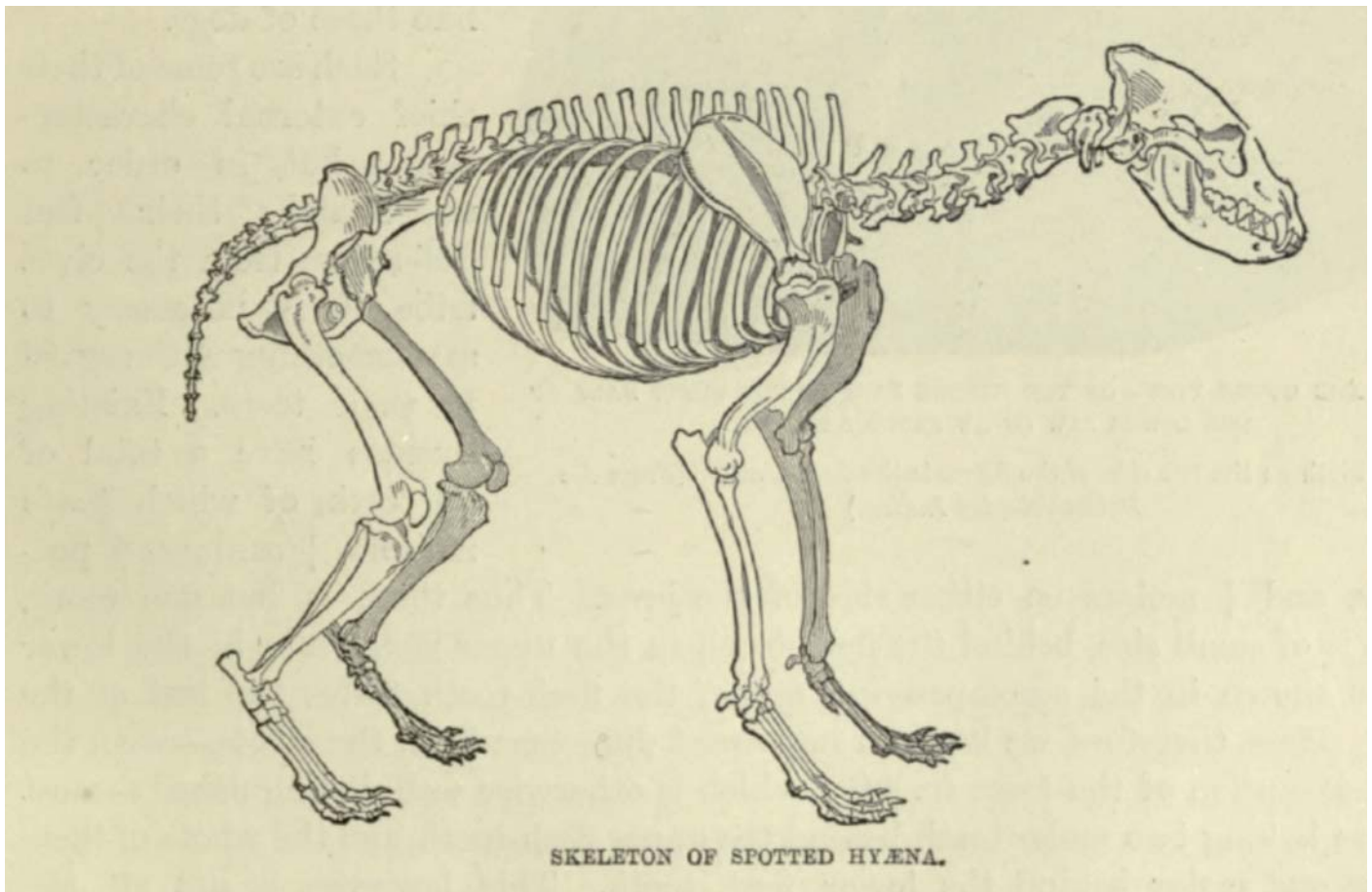
When spotted hyena cubs are born, they rank right below their mothers in the hierarchy. As they tussle with each other they learn the ranks of other individuals. By the time they are about eight months old, the cubs only attack clan members lower than them in the hierarchy; if they "forget their place" they could be injured or killed by a social superior and its allies. A hyena that pays no heed to the hierarchy can not survive long.

The fact the hyenas can readily recognize the ranks of other group members is most readily seen during bouts of aggression. Even though social status is more influential than sheer strength, it can still be risky for a dominant hyena to attack a larger, subordinate "victim." To lessen the risk of injury and shorten the conflict, the dominant animal might wait for another hyena to come along that is also higher in rank than the intended victim. Hyenas almost always come to the aid of the more dominant animal in confrontations, and relatively high-ranking group members can use this to their advantage in attacking lower-ranking ones.

Even when the roles are reversed and a subordinate animal attacks a dominant one, other hyenas will aid of the higher-ranking combatant. It does not matter who is the instigator or the victim. A dominant animal can expect assistance either way, but enmity between the opponents does not end when the fight does. Spotted hyenas are keenly aware family relationships, and individuals are more likely to attack the relatives of their opponents more than any other low-ranking hyenas. This is significant as low-ranking group members often bear the brunt of group aggression.

As Kay Holekamp, Sharleen Sakai, and Barbara Lundrigan concluded in a review of spotted hyena social intelligence, these behaviors are striking similar to those of some Old World monkeys like baboons. Although divided by nearly 100 million years of evolution, both Old World monkeys and hyenas have converged on similar social structures and high levels of intelligence required to manoeuvre through complex societies. This suggests that social interaction is a key to the development of high levels of intelligence, a hypothesis that has major implications for how our own intelligence evolved. It may be that interactions between group members were the context in which increased cognitive abilities became adaptive, and although we are repulsed by them, hyenas may be able to tell us more about how we evolved than we might like to acknowledge.

Perhaps not much can be done for the spotted hyena's public image. They are almost universally



Lydekker, R. (1893)

Skeleton of Spotted Hyena, *The Royal Natural History*, Vol. 1 Frederick Warne & Co. London, 1893 ©

regarded as dirty, contemptible fools; greedy eaters of the dead that chuckle as they crush bones. They break almost every taboo, but if we judge them only out of our own revulsion we can never understand them. They may not command the same respect as lions nor be as sleek as leopards, but the hordes of hyenas that course through the African night may tell us more about ourselves than any majestic cat.

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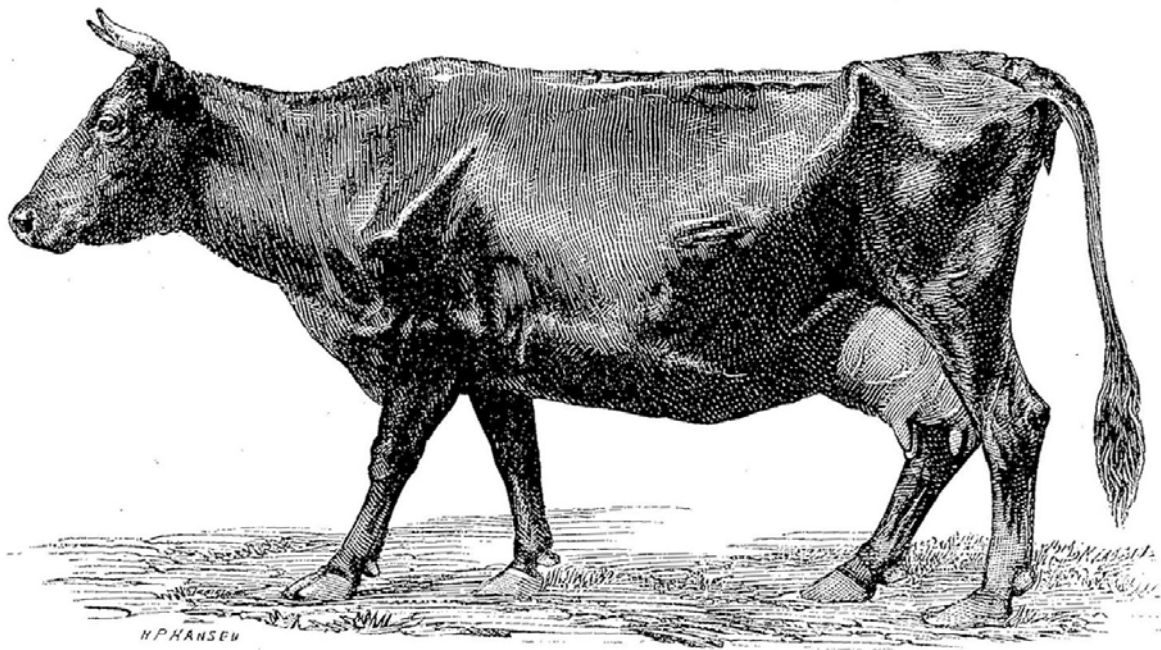
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Brian Switek is currently a student at Rutgers University studying evolution and ecology. He is the author of two blogs: *Laelaps* (<http://scienceblogs.com/laelaps/>) and *Dinosaur Tracking* (<http://dinosaur.smithsonianmag.com>). In January he will be attending the Science Online '09 conference and will be leading two discussions; one on the history of science and the other on how college students and professors can utilize the web in the classroom.

FAIR AND SQUARE

'Beauty vs. Butter in the Appreciation of the 19th Century Danish Dairy Cows' takes us through a journey in search of the perfect cow.

Text by Anne Katrine Gjerløff



Koen *Lille Elkenøre* af Chr. Bjerregaards Stamme i Elkenøre.

"The cow Lille Elkenøre was a super-model-cow, but commentaries declared her too lean and too extreme in her milking signs; especially the square sharp form" From Svendsen: Kvægavl og Kvægopdræt 1893, p. 128. ©

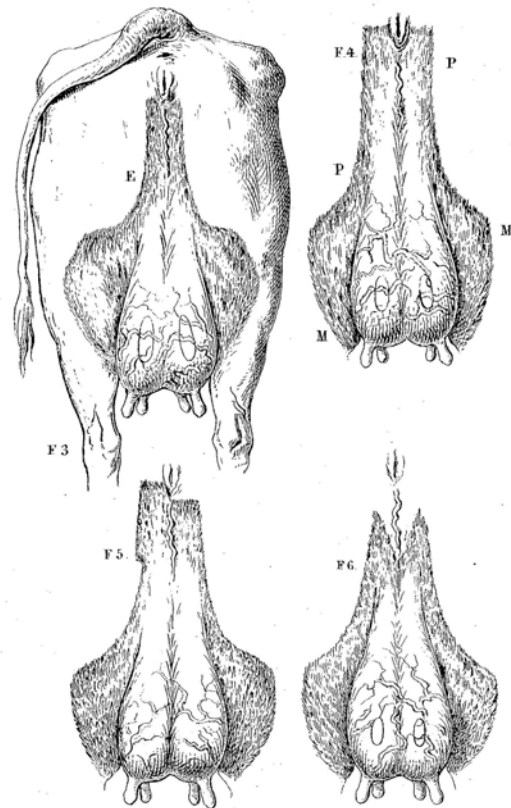
It was a pretty sight. All the females had red hair and bright eyes. Their skin was soft, the thighs were thin and the legs were nicely shaped. They were quite skinny but had large tits and their rear ends had just the right shape!

This isn't an excerpt from Playboy-Channel. It is a typical description of a herd of prize dairy cows from late 19th century rural Denmark. At animal fairs, in official evaluations of stock, in pedigree books, and in lectures on breeding, cows were considered beautiful. The emphasis on the looks of the cows was not founded on aesthetics though, but on the necessity of defining what out-put this specific cow was able to produce. The great changes in Danish husbandry farming in these decades made the farmers join in a collective effort to determine how to evaluate a cow's production. The looks of the cows were a prime factor in this development.

The background for the need to assess the individual cow's production represented an overall change in Danish agriculture, from reliance on crops to the better paid dairy and meat production. The international demand for Danish butter made the dairy cow the most important element of Danish agricultural production; way exceeding the cereals and the bacon pig. Effective husbandry became focused on the task of getting as much out-put from the cows as possible. This was not only a question of the amount and quality of the fodder, but also perceived to be a question of breed and individual appearances that revealed the milking potential of the cow.

One way to determine what cows were most desirable was the judgement of the best cows at animal fairs. The overall interest in the final decades of the 19th century was gathered around the Red Danish Cattle – a newly developed breed, originally bred from north German cattle. The accepted standards of the breed were the red colour and other certain characteristics – and most importantly the so called “milking signs”. A cow that possessed these signs and who had an impeccable pedigree would be likely to win a prize and claim admiration. 1

The milking signs and the breed was thus what defined a cow as beautiful. But these are easily deconstructed as the Red Danish breed was a very recent construction that was much debated, and the milking signs were a conglomerate of older, more or less pseudoscientific notions on how to value a cow just by looking at her. Many of the milking signs were actually just a way of knowing whether the cow was in good health – as the soft skin and the bright eyes – others were folklore or rooted in unproved scientific theories – as the affinity for judging milking ability from the upward

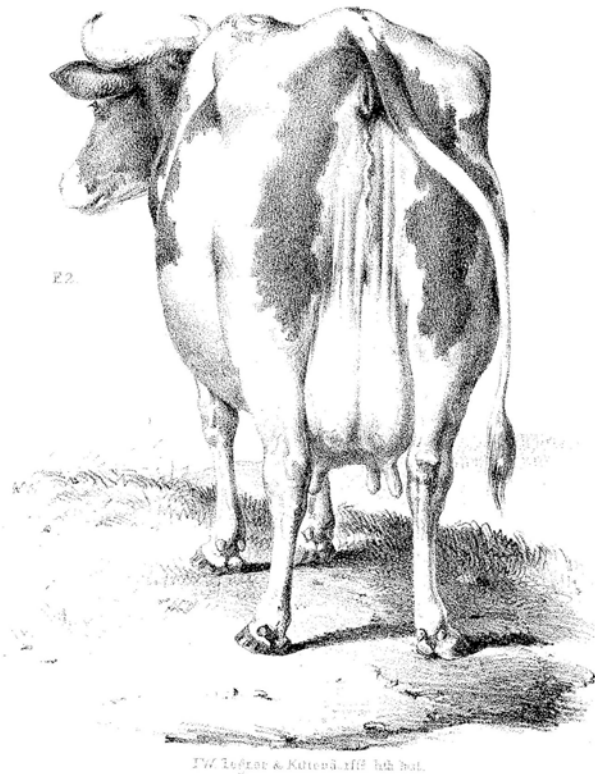


Andr. Hansen? lith. Inst.

Magne: Valg af Malkekøer, 1852 ©

turned hair on the rear end of the cow (the “escutcheon”) known as the Guenon-system. 2

National animal fairs were arranged every 2nd or 3rd year at the regular meetings for Danish farmers. In 1872 the King attended the fair. After admiring some large steers the King was taken to see other cows, when he asked “What are those strange skinny small animals?” – the cows referred to in this disrespectful manner was the prize dairy cattle of the day. 3 This anecdote tells us that the beauty of the Red Danes was not in the eye of the beholder, but in the wallet of the owner. The cow that produced most milk was considered the most beautiful cow – and the circle argument became that the cows that possessed the visual attributed probably also were the best milking cows.



Magne: *Valg af malkekøer*, 1852, pl. II ©

That the beauty of dairy cows was constructed in a combination of on aesthetics and economics is further illustrated by the fact that some cows were considered too extreme in their milking sign.

The prize cow, and great grand mother of a widely appraised stock, Lille Elkenøre was often mentioned as a great milking cow, but was described as having milked off it's meat. This was a desired ability for dairy cows, but had in this instance gone to far – the cow was too skinny, and was described as close to acquire tuberculosis for that reason. ⁴ The ability of putting all energy into milk production was exaggerated and the result became an extreme cow, which was no longer a pretty sight.

At the beginning of the 20th century a consensus existed on how to evaluate dairy cows. The milking signs were important, but exact measurements of milk output and the fat content of the milk became more and more important. Around 1900 the government held competitions for appointing central “Breeding centres” –

herds that were considered so good that they deserved official support. ⁵ Severe criticism of the appointments of breeding centres resulted in a poisonous debate on the principles of cattle breeding and on how to evaluate good cows.

The veterinarian Valdemar Stribolt wrote a series of articles in 1904-6 and pointed to the fact that the chosen Breeding Centres was NOT those with the best and most efficient production, but rather those which cows were considered of the best breed and with the best milking signs. Stribolt was adamant that the milking signs – and the beauty of the cows – were not an acceptable argument for government support. Production and not aesthetics was the future of Danish dairy production. His sarcasm was apparent in a reply to critics where he suggest that farmers may breed beautiful deer instead of cows if all they want is beauty. If the focus is on economy, efficiency and production, then other methods are needed than the old-fashioned milking signs. Stibolt wanted the farmers to choose between beauty and butter! ⁶

Stribolt's solution to the problem was a blow to the national pride and self-understanding of the farmers whose identity and belief in progress was deeply attached to the Danish red Cattle and their various characteristics. Stribolt pointed out that progress demanded a new breed for butter production and suggested the Jersey breed as perfect in this regard. This caused uproar in defence of the Red Danes that (in spite of its status as a relative newcomer) was considered close connected to the Danish landscape, soil and temperament. ⁷

Stribolt's untimely death in 1907 ended the debate, but he had severely questioned the principles and priorities of Danish cattle breeding. The protectionist approach to the Red Danish Cattle slowly disappeared even though it remained connected with national sentimentalism and patriotism. The jersey cows are today a common sight in Denmark – and they are considered very beautiful with their light brown skin and large eyes full of expression. The Red Danes are slowly disappearing as a distinctive breed, and only very few animals today resembles the acclaimed cattle of the late 19th century.

Many aspects in the debate are left unspoken, but in the end of this essay I will dare to touch on the question on what the thing is about cows? – how can a large square animal, constantly chewing grass, rumination and defecating endlessly be considered beautiful? – apart from the beauty of the money you can earn from its milk, meat and hide.

As the introduction to this essay suggests one explanation is that the cow is essential female and possess in abundance all things connected to femaleness.



Edwin Landseer
The Wild Cattle of Chillingham, 1867 ©

A cow's life (in our time and culture) is a circle of birth, milk, passivity and submission – a cow is fertility, femininity and nature incarnated. A cow is a super-female with languishing eyes and huge udder; a giver of lives to calves and food to men.

A cow is beautiful, and even sexy, not because of its individual looks but because of the associations and the human dependence on it.

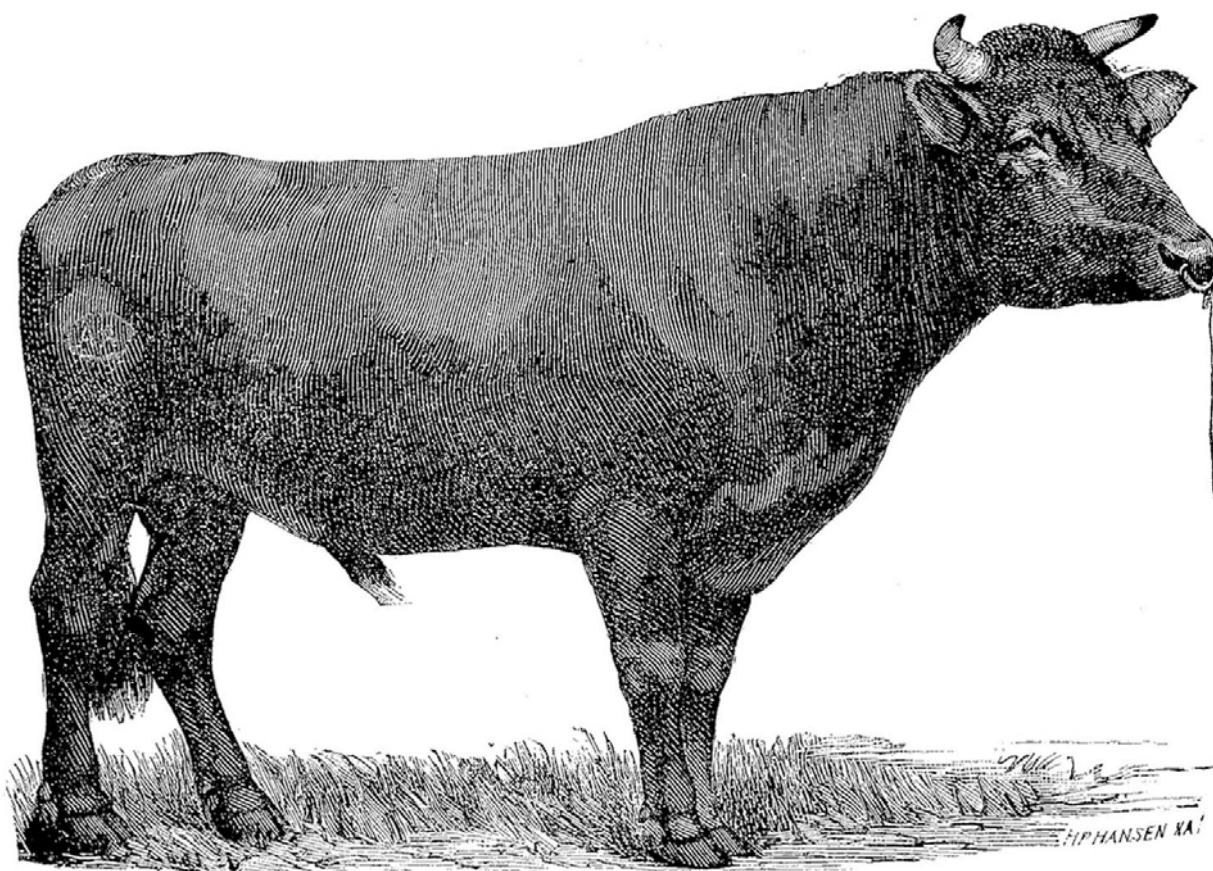
Some interpretations of the agricultural revolution in Neolithic Europe suggest that the dominance over animals was a turn from a female-centred society to a patriarchy. In the course of event both women and nature became dominated and domesticated. In this sense one can argue that cows and women share a similar historic fate, but that liberation of cows is nowhere to be seen in a near future.

Going into ancient history, the feminine beauty of cows is well described – like Homer describe the goddess Hera with eyes like a heifer. Earlier archaeological evidence from the Middle East suggests

that cows were at the centre of religion in the Assyrian and Egyptian empires and the evidence from Minoan culture is compelling. Cows are in all these instances connected to fertility and femininity – while (male) power is the bull's domain. ⁸

While sexuality is mostly associated with bulls, fertility is normally connected to cows. Again ancient legends are ripe with tales of women fascinated by bulls, like Princess Europa abducted by Zeus as a bull, and the queen-bull union that created the Cretean minotaur. But cows as super-females have of cause also resulted in instances of serious infatuation. The Danish writer Sigfred Pedersen wrote his "Hymn to a dear lady friend" with the words: "Your body is pretty, how firm your thighs, your bosom is wide. Your back is straight. When the sun flames in your red hair, you are the most wonderful girl of the parish". The subject of this praise was of course his childhood favourite cow.⁽⁹⁾ In early modern Sweden the cow's stable was considered a female sphere to such an intent that male presence was suspect and hinted a sexual interest in the cows. Even so in the 20th century the Swedish writer Ivar Lo-Johanson wrote of his childhood where "The soft furs of the young heifers, their climbing on each other out in the woods and the fields, their open exposure of their sex and heat, was even more tempting". ¹⁰

With a long historical background for appreciating the beauty of cows one should not be surprised why 19th century farmers found their cows to be beautiful – it would seem stranger if not so. The problems in the decades around 1900 was not whether the cows were beautiful but to agree – publicly and with oneself – in what way. Was it the cow's female appearance, the aesthetics of eyes and colour, the lush pouring of milk into the bucket, the applause at the fair, the pride of reward or the sound of gold in the wallet? Cows are beautiful in a complicated way and the beauty of a cow is not necessarily in how it looks but in what it is.



Anglertyr, 3 Aar gl., Brystomfang 70½", Højde (over Manken) 54", tilhørende P. J. Petersen i Trøelshøj ved Flensborg præmieret ved Dyrskuet i Bremen 1891.

Svendsen: Kvægavl og Kvægopdræt, 1893, pp36-7 ©

- 1) *Some of the changing perceptions of cows and husbandry are discussed in Esben Hedegaard: Visions and Revisions of Rational Animal Farming and true Stockmanship. In The Agricultural Revolution – Reconsidered, Landbohistorisk Selskab, 1998, pp.49-64; Esben Hedegaard: Koen som konstruktion. ARR – Idehistorisk Tidsskrift, 1995, vol. 7(2), pp42-55 and Anne Katrine Gjerløff: Creating the Comfortable Cow, forthcoming in a publication from the GenNa-Centre, University of Uppsala.*
- 2) *The Guenon-system was introduced in Denmark in the 1840's by the esteemed cattle breeder J.B.H. Andersen. An English translation of Guenons theory is online on http://www.archive.org/stream/howtoselectcowso00haza/ho wtoselectcowso00haza_djvu.txt*
- 3) *Jensen-Børup & Dorph-Petersen: De danske Lndmandsforsamlinger i det 19de Aarhundrede. Odense, 1900, pp.133-34.*
- 4) *Lille Elkenøre is described in A. Svendsen: Kvægavl og Kvægopdræt. København, 1893, pp.128-9*
- 5) *The report on the breeding centres: P.A. Mørkeberg: Avlscentre for Kvæg af Rød dansk Malkerace, København 1899.*
- 6) *Valdemar Stribolts main publications are V. Stribolt Ere de raadende Principper i vor Kvægavl rigtige?, Maanedsskrift for Dyrleger XIII, 1901 and V. Stribolt: Principperne i vor Kvægavl. Odense, 1904.*
- 7) *The appreciation of Danish cows, see Johansen, Kernel & Ærsøe: Koen. Kvæget i dansk landbrug, Odense, 1964 and*

- 8) *Anne Katrine Gjerløff: Kampen om den røde ko. Den Jyske Historiker, 2009 (in press).*
- 9) *The early history of domestication and perceptions of cows see Linda Kalof (ed.): A Cultural History of Animals in Antiquity, Berg 2007 and Hannah Velten: Cow, Reaction Books, 2007.*
- 10) *My translation from the original poem quoted in Johansen, Kernel & Ærsøe: Koen. Kvæget i dansk landbrug, Odense, 1964, p. 104*
- 11) *Ivar Lo-Johanson is cited and translated in Jonas Liliequist: Peasants against nature: crossing the boundaries between man and animal in seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century Sweden. Journal of the History of Sexuality 1991, vol. 1(3), . 414. The quote is from Lo-Johanson's autobiography Pubertet, 1978.*

Anne Katrine Gjerløff was born 1974 in Copenhagen, Denmark. Her Ph.D. dissertation is titled *The Faces of the Ape – History and Popularization of Palaeoanthropology in 20th Century Denmark* from The University of Copenhagen. She has curated the exhibition *Feuding Over the Past* at Sønderborg Castle and written the catalogue. Currently, she is post-doc researcher at SAXO Institute, University of Copenhagen, funded by the Danish Research Council. Her research focuses on the rights and roles of animals around 1900. Anne Katrine Gjerløff teaches graduate courses in animal history and history of science. She is chairman of the History Society and editor of two Danish history journals.

EIGHT MINUTES IN WONDERLAND

Battle at Kruger is an amateur wildlife video that depicts an unfolding confrontation between a herd of Cape Buffalo. After being posted on YouTube in 2007, Battle at Kruger became a viral video sensation and was widely praised for its dramatic depiction of wildlife on the African savannah. It was one of YouTube's most popular videos, with more than 37 million views and 40,818 comments as of 22 October 2008, and won the Best Eyewitness Video in the 2nd Annual YouTube Video Awards.

Text by Andrew Patrizio

Reflections on The Battle at Kruger [1]

I

‘**B**eauty brings copies of itself into being’ [2]

The *Battle at Kruger* is eight and a half minutes of amateur footage captured at Kruger National Park in September 2004. It has since turned into a media phenomenon. The clip, uploaded on YouTube two and a half years later and now approaching nearly 40m hits, is gripping, however I want to explore the way it seems to capture, almost against itself, other themes particularly around aesthetics and ethics. Perhaps *Battle* is the contemporary defining moment for Kruger National Park, a summation of why it was established in the first place.

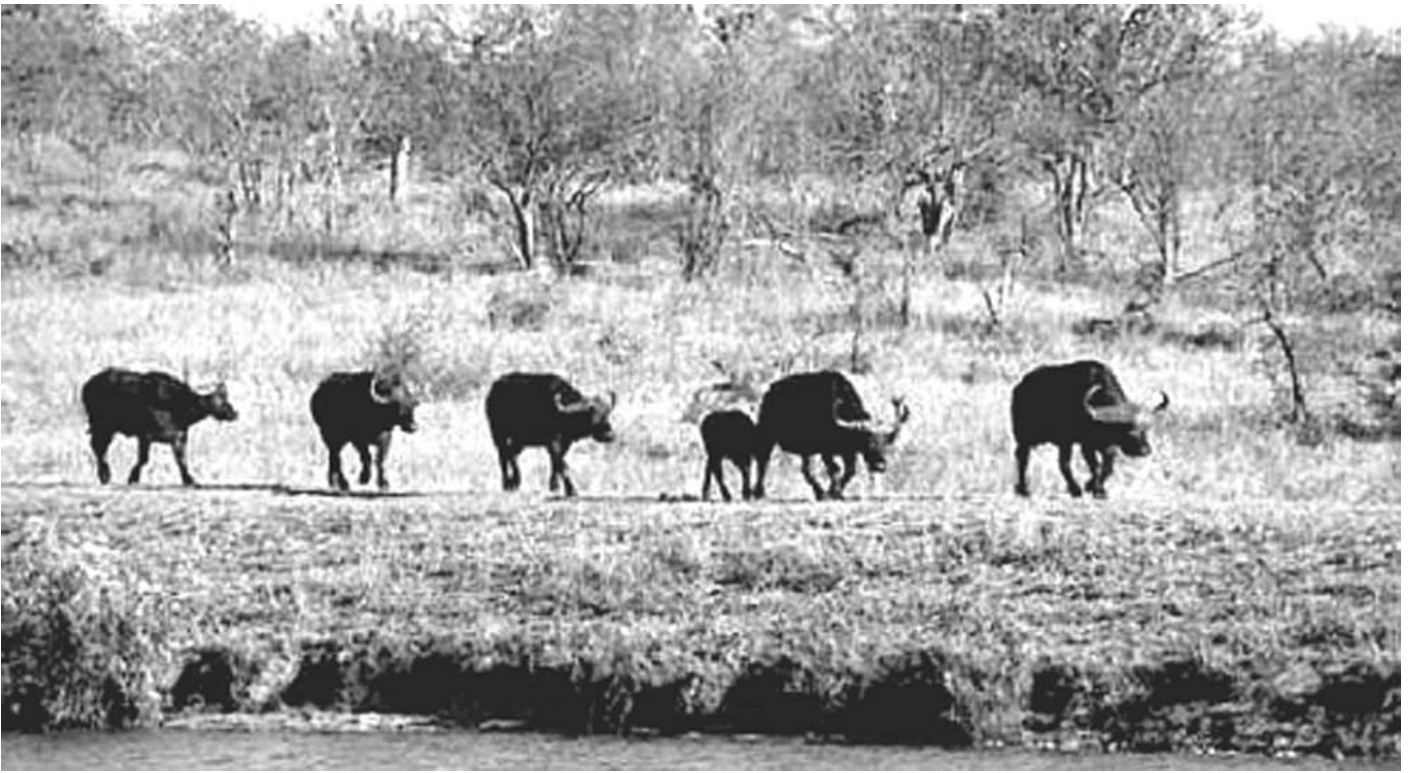
Battle at Kruger is available to view on YouTube at <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=LU8DDYz68kM> or through the site <http://battleatkruger.com/> established by the person who filmed it, David Budzinski, and his colleague, photographer Jason Schlosberg. Watch it now, or if you prefer here is what happens:

The view is from a hand-held camera positioned on the roof of a jeep, looking across a stretch of water, the other side of which a herd of Cape buffalo, numbering around 100, are walking, left to right. Budzinski and Schlosberg are part of a tourist group, so the footage is punctuated by numerous observations. An

early comment - ‘They’re heading towards the lions...’ - sets up the anticipated confrontation. ‘This could be very interesting,’ offers the South African tour guide. The lead buffalos spot a small pack of young lions crouching in front of them, but bolt back once the lions attack. Just over two minutes into the video, five lions have brought the leading calf down, who emits two hollow bellows at impact, and they together tumble into the water at its edge.

A strange stasis is established at this point, between the resisting calf and the engaged lions. The tourists, adjacent to the film-maker, interject with ‘Oh God, I’m shaking’, ‘Can’t they help him now, Frank?’, and ‘Oh, they’re going to fight over it.’ At 3.40 minutes into the footage, a crocodile appears from the water, trying to get purchase on the calf by the hoof. The tug of war end quickly when crocodile loses its grip and lions drag the calf further up onto dry land.

The buffalo herd regroup and return. The larger buffalo drives off the lions one by one, and in one particularly spectacular moment flings one of the attackers into the air with its horns, to gasps from the tourists. After six minutes it becomes clear that the calf is alive amongst the pack and seeking to regain its feet. With another buffalo charge, the lions lose their grip of the calf, who unsteadily re-enters the herd. The tourist



The Battle at Kruger, film still, 2008

commentators increase their interjections, with ‘Come on, buffalo, go on’, encouraging them to attack the lions. ‘Oh they’re terrified, the lions.’ The young lions are chased away, with the guide’s comment ‘I’ve never seen anything like this. I mean I’ve seen it on video and on movies.’

An American companion is heard to say to Budzinski, ‘You could sell that video...’ *‘When Buffalo Attack!’* Budzinski laughs, and replies ‘Probably.’

II

The ‘battle’ was fought at Transport Dam, a southerly watering hole between Pretoriuskop and Skukuza camps. Kruger itself lies in the north-east of South Africa, bordering Mozambique’s own Limpopo National Park and Zimbabwe’s Gonarezhou. Kruger National Park is massive (19,633 km²) and contains hundreds of distinct species of trees, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. The original park was founded in 1898 as the Sabie Game Reserve by the then president of the Transvaal Republic, Paul Kruger. It wasn’t until 1926 that Kruger National Park came into being, a year later opening to tourists. The reassignment from game reserve to national park is significant, as Carruthers warns us – because the land and its resources are withheld from the national weal. ‘Games reserves, as specified areas which are closed to the public, are essentially conservative and undemocratic because the

land and its resources are withheld from the national weal. The principle of a national park is different, in that it is conservationist, not preservationist, and exists for the benefit of the public who have a right to enter it in order to enjoy it.’ [3] Since its founding, Kruger embodies a number of borders, more or less artificial - from its formal perimeter inscribed against a set of natural features that long predate it; the negotiated access for tourists and gamesmen set against the histories of the indigenous populations; and of course the fact that human and non-human animals encounter each other in a technologically mediated landscape. Visitor traffic shoots with guns, video or still cameras; custodians also use walkie-talkies, helicopters and GPS.

Battle exists precisely within a longer history of explorer-hunter-thrill seeker discourses into nature. Kelwyn Sole’s prose-poem *The Dream of the Big Five* bemoans the ‘Busloads of retirees begging to be aired in washed-out, thorn-beridden winter veld, so they could wear their Out of Africa khakis - silly, but a space to dream far from the polluted northern skies, I guess, with no one damaged.’ [4] Representing an earlier era for Kruger, hunter-heroes such as James Stevenson-Hamilton gripped readers with ‘Tales of everyday life in the outdoors, exploring, observing, camping and dealing with poachers, enlivened throughout by the excitement of a dangerous lion or crocodile encounter...’ [5]



The Battle at Kruger, film still, 2008

One of the key books with an environmentalist concern (a *Silent Spring* for Africa), is Peter Beard's *The End of the Game. The Last Word from Paradise. A Pictorial Documentation of the Origins, History and Prospects of the Big Game in Africa*. Though it concentrates largely on Kenya, Beard laments relates to the contemporary African landscape as a whole, where we are witness to, 'the end of nature's processes, patterns, cycles, balances: all equilibrium and harmony destroyed. As boundaries are declared with walls and ditches, and cement suffocates the land, the great herds of the past become concentrated in new and strange habitats. Densities rise... Imbalance is compounded.' [6] This imbalance and density is represented in *Battle*, filmed as it was in September, the end of the dry winter period when water is scarce, and when rivers and water holes such as Transport Dam become particularly concentrated centres of animal activity. *Battle* plays itself out as a purportedly 'natural' event under the shadowless glare of mediated tourism. 'The wilderness of only half a century ago, then so completely itself, has been reduced, tree by tree, animal by animal, shadow by shadow, rock by rock, to its last rutted corners. The few remaining spaces have

been infiltrated, divided-up, domesticated, deprived of natural systems, denuded of natural processes, systematized, similarized, artificialized, sterilized, commercialized...' [7]

The compressed mediation of *Battle* has close parallels with the environmental over-manipulation that is Beard's target. *Battle* is the enactment of a predator/prey system out of kilter, where little pockets of herd mentality and sociality quite normal in buffalo and lions are performed by animals who may not be caged but are certainly bounded by a tourist industry who expects just such encounters, though rare, to body forth out of the landscape it has spent over a century constructing.

In *Battle* the lions, being young specimens, are rather *becoming* lions, and quite naturally expressing this through predatory behaviour. They grapple for four minutes with prey that when older they will dispatch in seconds. The calf too is *becoming* buffalo, part of a herd and proto-prey. The temporarily isolated calf nearly *becomes* food in a brief scenario where both species assert, to greater and lesser extents, their evolutionary *raison-d'être*. The heightened individuation that takes



The Battle at Kruger, film still, 2008

place in *Battle*, when the buffalo herd ‘rescue’ the calf from becoming prey, is of course the main reason for its popularity. As de Waal has commented, the social aspect of animals ‘are products of natural selection found in members of species with better survival chances in a group than in solitude. The advantages of group life can be manifold, the most important being increased chances to find food, defence against predators, and strength in numbers against competitors.’ [8]

III

Since David Budzinski and Jason Schlosberg brought their film and photographs into the public realm, the *Battle at Kruger* phenomenon through its promotional strategies has been vigorously pursued. Rather than amateur footage being a force for social change, revelation and emancipation, as the activist film-maker Peter Wintonick rightly envisages a serious contribution of the camcorder revolution, *The Battle at Kruger* website (inexplicably subtitled *Always Believe!*), sets out baseball caps, t-shirts and bags printed with high-resolution stills for purchase. For an even greater price, you can purchase rights to screen the film and reproduce the photographs (the latter retailing at \$1000 for five images). *Battle* as online artefact has to perform within a

viewing space that is as congested as the Transport Dam itself, with adverts, signposts and hyperlinks to numerous other places (including 3-4-5-day safaris to Kruger) intruding.

The morally inscribed lines of battle are redrawn constantly in the footage, from herd to pack, lion to calf, lion to crocodile, herd to lion, calf to herd. The concomitant roles of leader, attacker, attacked, disturbed, group member, victorious and vanquished, food and not-yet-food also are mobilised in rapid succession. In addition, a conglomerate of roles and positions are set out before us - human and animal, expert guide and tourist, South African and American, impoverished, invisible inhabitants and rich, visible travellers, recorders and the recorded.

But whilst this was a real life-and-death episode for the calf and the lions, there was no real danger for the onlookers. The 2004 trip and the quintessential YouTube moment that came from it, offers a safe substitute for the associated emotions around hunting and voyeurism. And whilst *Battle* was never intended as art, nor promoted as such, Jonathan Burt’s comments on Bill Viola’s *I do not know what it is I am like* (1986) are useful: ‘The film makes visible forms of contact without contact, and suggests some thoughts about distancing in



The Battle at Krugher, film still, 2008

human-animal relations that are at present bedevilled by either too much proximity (exploitation) or too much distance (carelessness towards beings remote from our concerns). The implication is that some forms of distance need to be kept in place, that species differences need to be respected rather than have their boundaries blurred.' [9] One reading is that the proximity offered to the tourists at Transport Dam was a consequence of exploitation originated at Kruger's foundational philosophy, exploitation that was near enough to be picked up by a relatively low quality technology. Such asset-stripping of South Africa's animal activity, upon which merchandise and sales opportunities are prominently hung, is then continued directly from the initial trip supported by the commercial end of online communication and distribution. As Peter Beard complained, in relation to the soil of Africa - 'Life slowly gives way to a flat desert mirage,' [10] and the same can be said of *Battle's* transformation of the Kruger landscape.

It is obvious that there is a strong element of anthropomorphism underpinning the exploitation of the footage. The buffalo stand in for family, the vulnerable, loyal, resilient and victorious. The lions are predatory, opportunistic, yet inept. Equally the crocodiles are lazy, also opportunistic and inept. This lineage goes back in time - '...at the beginning of the [20th] century...some

species, like crocodile, were despised because they were "an animated trap, something lower than the meanest of reptiles" which made one's "flesh creep"...' [11] The footage has become the basis for a 2008 National Geographic documentary on the making of *Battle at Kruger* that was purposely screened on Mother's Day. [12] As Werner Herzog said of his documentary on Timothy Treadwell, called *Grizzly Man* - 'This isn't a film about wild nature, it's a film about human nature.' [13]

IV

Herzog also described Treadwell's footage as having 'unprecedented, unspeakable beauty.' [14] Western constructions of beauty in culture erupt into meditations on nature at all points. In Carruthers' view of South Africa's parks, 'The sole philosophical imperative was an aesthetic one, expressed by E N Buxton, the head of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire, who considered wild animal species to be akin to works of art...' [15] In the US, Theodore Roosevelt stated along similar lines, in 1905, that, '...it's perhaps too much to hope that the larger carnivores can be preserved for merely aesthetic reasons.' [16] Such formulations have rhetoric power but are also weird. Animals are artworks only in the minds of certain humans who wish to see them that way. So when animals start behaving in particular and dramatic ways

towards each other, our conventional response is to seek to understand this directly in human terms, hence the anthropomorphism in the reception of *Battle*. The beauty of YouTube is that now 40 million viewers worldwide feel they have shared in a moment of wild and preternatural disruption, in which predators learn how to be red in tooth and claw, but with live commentary provided.

The vivid and compelling footage in *Battle* framed within morally dubious packaging leads one to believe that something is ringing false here. This is why Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) dealing as it does directly with aesthetics and ethics together, is useful here, despite the fact that her terms of reference are entirely human and cultural. Long before *Battle* was shot, Scarry wrote, 'that symmetry across social relations is usually invisibly dispersed out over a large expanse but in rare and exceptional moments comes to be compressed down into a small enough space to be directly available to sensory perception.' [17] *Battle* is itself a microcosmic vignette that stands in for a much larger moral, emotional and physical landscape lying beyond the camera lens. It plays out various symmetrical and asymmetrical relations across and between humans and animals in highly compact form. In a limited sense, anthropomorphic readings are understandable (the 'plot' of *Battle* maps on well to *Black Hawk Down* for example) but our duties, emotional ties, and reactions get all muddled along the way.

Is *Battle at Kruger* a beautiful artefact, not in a visual sense but in Scarry's? What if, along with Scarry, we believe that 'Beauty...intensifies the pressure we feel to repair existing injuries.' [18] For Scarry, perceiving the beautiful '...is bound up with an urge to protect it, or act on its behalf, in a way that appears to be tied up with the perception of its lifelikeness.' [19] This strikes me as an environmentalism of the scopic regime. Is it conceivable to recuperate a world in which the battle we see could yet become a performative moment more akin to those that took place in the African bush before Kruger? Or more radically, rather than recuperation, could those events happen now free from the tourist trade that bodied it forth? (If a calf falls in the bush with no-one to observe, does it make a sound?)

Scarry evokes an expanded notion of environmentalism within aesthetics. 'Through its beauty, the world continually recommits us to a rigorous standard of perceptual care...' [20] The danger of enfolding *Battle* within a kitsch and commercial wrapping (such as the Mother's Day screening) de-radicalises any profound message contained within the footage, so that the deeper consequences cannot be taken seriously and attended to. Even some of the responses I have had when discussing this artefact with friends and colleagues

indicate a certain academic propensity to consign *Battle* into the dustbin of romanticised curio. Fair enough perhaps, yet it strikes me that the congested drama contained within *Battle* is too readily transcribed on to human concepts of sociality and vulnerability, and left there. By being made available to the senses, through online mediation, the footage also shows a route towards a reconstructed notion of what ethical beauty might look like. Ethical beauty is ethical fairness. 'It is clear that an *ethical fairness* which requires "a symmetry of everyone's relation" will be greatly assisted by an *aesthetic fairness* that creates in all participants a state of delight in their own lateralness.' [21] Scarry proposes that beauty can be set within symmetrical relationships and ethical reciprocity. And, following her, I think that might mean something for the animals.

V

Ultimately and without meaning to, *Battle* speaks eloquently of *stasis*, a term familiar to connoisseurs of aesthetics. At the end of the eight minute film, materially very little has actually changed. Although we know nothing about how the calf fared after its ordeal it nevertheless returns to the fold, the herd continues on its way, the lions and crocodiles do not eat, the tour moves on. The primary change occurs on the level of culture. A new artefact, *The Battle at Kruger* has been brought into being, alongside its accompanying merchandise, tour adverts and dinner table stories. The animals in Kruger National Park will have to wait until some short time in the future before lives are taken for food. In contrast, we humans move out of those eight minutes with a seemingly accidental but in fact inevitable and instructive artefact.

1. *My title is an adaptation of Three Weeks in Wonderland: The Kruger National Park, Cape Town, Juta, 1934, by Edith Prance.*

2. Scarry, 3

3. Jane Carruthers (1995) *The Kruger National Park. A Social and Political History*, Pietermaritzburg: The University of Natal Press, 11

4. Kelwyn Sole (2006) *Land Dreaming: Prose Poems*, Scottsville: University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 75

5. James Stevenson-Hamilton (1937) *South African Eden*, quoted in Carruthers, 111. Coincidentally, Stevenson-Hamilton's nickname among the locals was *Skukuza* - he who scrapes clean - and also the name of the camp near to where *Battle* was filmed.

6. Peter Beard (1965, reprinted 1988) *The End of the Game. The Last Word from Paradise. A Pictorial Documentation of the Origins, History and Prospects of the Big Game in Africa*, London: Thames & Hudson, np

7. Peter Beard, 44

8. Frans de Waal (1996) *Good Natured. The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*, Camb. Mass: Harvard University Press, 9

9. Jonathan Burt, 'The Aesthetics of Livingness', *Antennae*, (The Death of the Animal), #5, Spring 2008, 11

10. Peter Beard, np

11. From A B Percival (1928) *A Game Ranger on Safari*, London, quoted in Jane Carruthers, 32

12. Space does not allow for a whole media analysis of Battle, but here it is interesting to note the strong link between film-makers and producers of mainstream wildlife documentaries such as those screened by National Geographic and drama serials such as *Cops* and *The X Files*. See Naomi Pfefferman, 'Nature calls - and camera roll - in Wild Things', *American Cinematographer*, vol 81, #8, August 2000.

13. In Ron Magrid, 'Bearing Witness', *American Cinematographer*, vol 86, #8, August 2005, 31

14. In Magrid, 31

15. E N Buxton *Two African Trips* quoted by Jane Carruthers 109

16. Peter Beard, 197

17. Elaine Scarry (1999) *On Beauty and Being Just*, London: Duckworth, 106

18. Elaine Scarry, 57

19. Elaine Scarry, 80

20. Elaine Scarry, 81

21. Elaine Scarry, 114

I would like to acknowledge the generous information provided to me by Dr Carroll Clarkson (University of Cape Town), Sonja Henrici (Scottish Documentary Institute at Edinburgh College of Art) and artist Jeremy Deller.

Andrew Patrizio is a writer and curator, previously at Glasgow Museums and the Hayward Gallery, London. Over 2000-2 he was also Associate Curator at the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle. He has worked on large exhibitions, most recently 'Anatomy Acts' for the Scotland & Medicine Partnerships, 2006 (Gulbenkian Prize nominee and Medical Book of the Year, 2007, and AHRC funded).

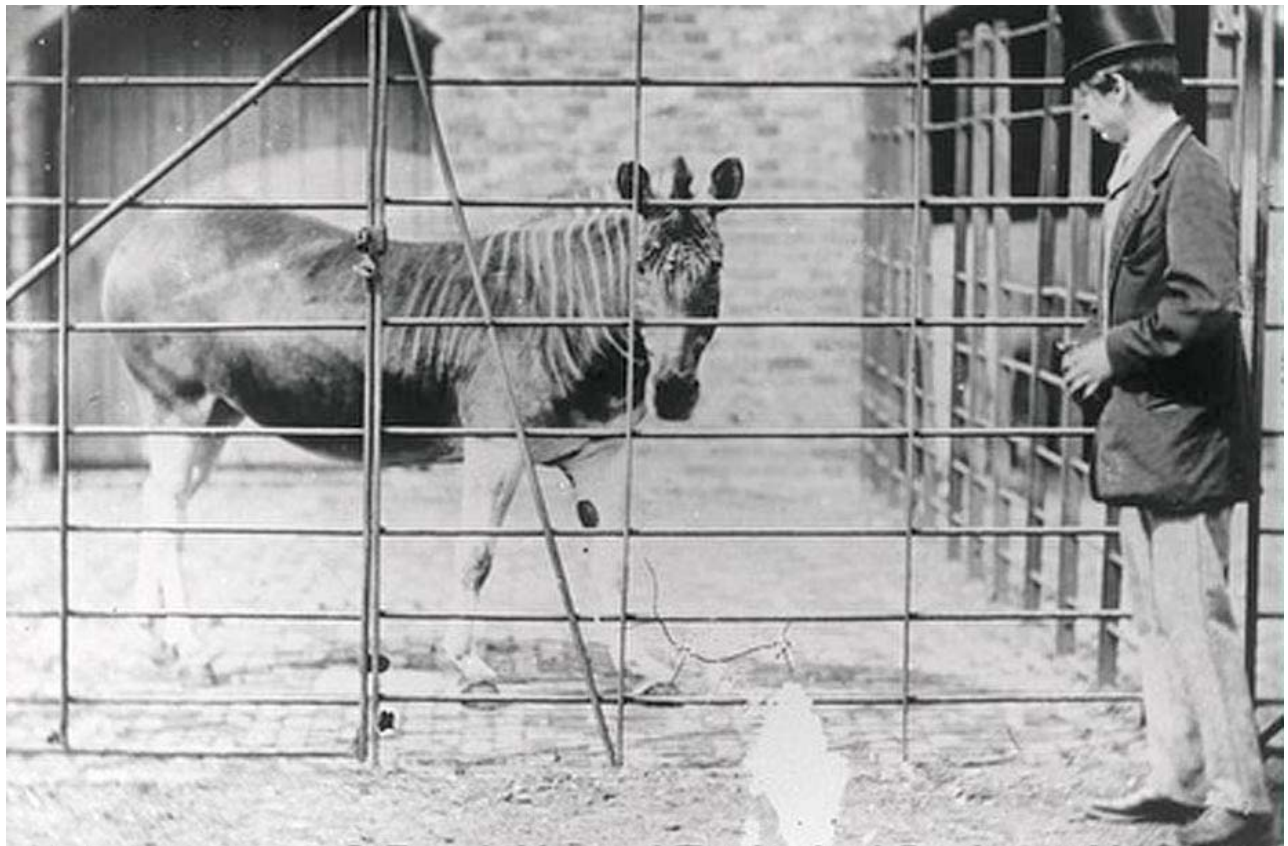
Publications include *Contemporary Sculpture in Scotland* (1999, Craftsman House, Australia), Stefan Gec (2002, Black Dog Publishing, London) and 'A Phantom Limb: feeling the gap between invisibility and touch in recent British art' (*New Formations*, 2002). In 2007-8 he held an AHRC grant to develop *The Species of Origin* project on Darwin and contemporary art, with Prof Emiliios Christodoulidis, University of Glasgow. He has co-authored a chapter on Darwin and Contemporary Art for a forthcoming book 'The Art of Evolution: Darwin and Visual Cultures' edited by Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer (University Press of New England, 2009).

He was awarded a Chair in 2008 from Edinburgh College of Art, where he has been Director of Research Development since 1997.

ZEBRONKEY: GRAZING IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC FIELD

The quagga is an extinct subspecies of the Plains zebra, which was once found in great numbers in South Africa's Cape Province and the southern part of the Orange Free State. It was distinguished from other zebras by having the usual vivid marks on the front part of the body only. Robin Thomas, finds that it is not completely vanished.

*Text by **Robin Thomson***



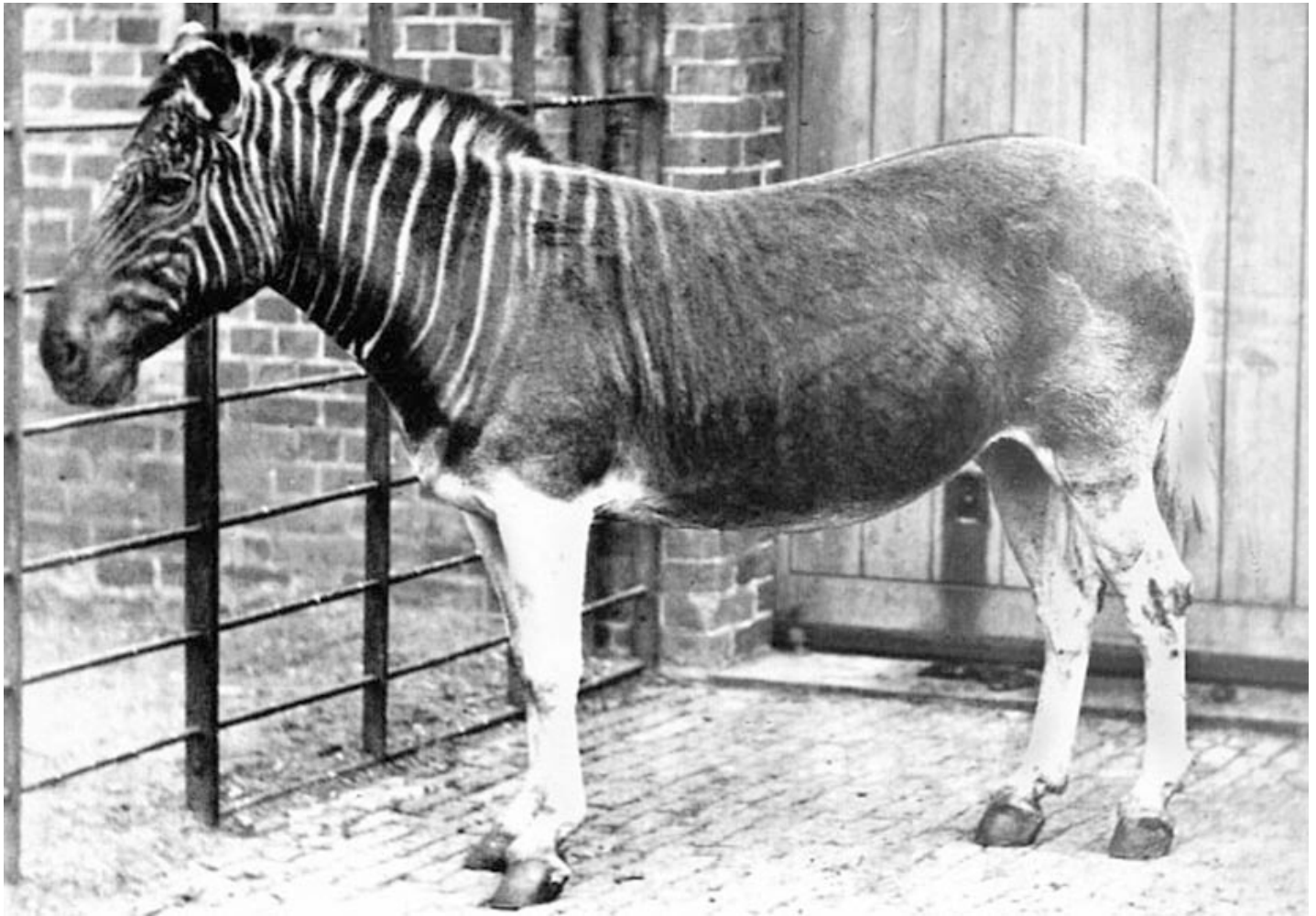
The Quagga Enclosure at Regents Park Zoo, London ©

Out of the entire species of the extinct quagga zebra there exists only a handful of photographs of one living individual animal. The only one ever to have been photographed alive was in the Regent's Park Zoo in London in 1870. There are five photographs known to exist of the mare, taken by Frederick York and Frank Haes. These hold a very special connection to the fateful narrative of the animal, marking out its precarious path into technological afterlife.

The thread of this article takes 'transference' as

how the camera functions as a kind of magical summons – recalling, resurrecting, revisiting the departed – and how it functions also as the a kind of 'crypt' in which things and in this particular case, animals, are kept caged up and not allowed to escape.

To begin with, one can describe, crudely scientifically, the way in which the quagga species vanished, seemingly unnoticed, from the world. The photograph of the individual animal taken in London in 1870 can be viewed as a kind of bearing in its adventure from bountiful species to inexhaustible image; a kind of



The Quagga at Regents Park Zoo, London ©

its core. That is, the disappearance of the physical quagga from the animal and natural world and its reappearance in the photographic, two-dimensional one. As a kind of mirror to this physical disappearance – an inversion of its extinction – the extant animal living on in technological conservation, I explore what the role of the camera is in relation to the past-but-present animal:

pivot of its changing motions and states. Here we witness the animal being is transferred to another temporal and spatial dimension: if we imagine a funnel like shape wherein we have the entire quagga species collected in the top half, we can imagine their numbers slowly diminishing as they are hunted, until we get close to the apex where the last few individual animals are

collected (mostly in captivity). It is at this point that the quagga mare is photographed in Regents Park Zoo and a strange thing happens: right at the junction of these two volumes, like light pouring through a pin-hole camera, there is a subtle kink; a small but significant glitch in the processual flow of things. Positions shift slightly, barely unnoticeable at such a miniscule scale (individual) but projecting outwards, and in time, reveals an inverted image, a profound reversal of the previous events. This funnel shaped process of events is punctuated with the click of the photographer's camera resonating in Regents Park zoo, issuing outwards and onwards into the future of the photographed animal. At this point time literally freezes.

The fading zoological universe of the material quagga zebra is weighed against the carefully exposed photographs, proliferating and reproducing endlessly like a living organism. This funnel-like process channelling the dying animal world into the reproductive photographic world resembles the constitution of the double helix of DNA. Aptly, the quagga zebra was the first extinct species to have its DNA tested.

This theoretical funnel-like process is comparable to the phenomenon we see at work within the camera obscura: a mediation of the real world by man's technological intervention. We could even imagine the whole quagga species vanishing through the aperture of the camera, only appearing again 'on the other side', carried by that last individual mare in Regents Park: The 'enclosure' of the animal, in the sense of a fixed place – the photographic plate – naturally leads to photographic exposure. The camera (literally 'chamber') fortifies this regulated space; its tricky interior architecture – mirrors, lenses, shutters– submit the image to all sorts of manipulations and manoeuvres involving projection, inverting and focusing. It is in the chamber of course that one locates the super-developed pinhole, through which the external world plummets into a void of stillness and silence.

This metaphorical depiction of the chamber as a prison-like edifice is something that was explored by Roland Barthes in his emotional investigation of the nature of photography: 'Camera Lucida', released in 1980, and that has been taken up again recently by Akira Mizuta Lippit in his analysis of the circumstances of the modern, technological animal in 'Electric Animal'. The metaphors that surround the photographic phenomenon, of animals in particular, often employ violent or oppressive imagery. One talks of 'shooting' pictures; the camera apparatus has a chamber not unlike a gun; even the shutter somehow resembles a trigger. We can picture the harems and herds of zebra's running from the hunter's guns, being chased right into the photographic future. Indeed Lippit has even gone as far

as to say that 'Modern technology can be seen as a massive mourning apparatus, summoned to incorporate a disappearing animal presence' (1), which seems particularly profound in the case of the quagga zebra and its few surviving photographs. The only reference to the living animal being is fixed on the photographic plate—locked up inside like a cadaver in a glass coffin: the chemical alternative to taxidermy. His black and white stripes seem somehow ironic in this case; bringing to mind the striped uniforms of jail-prisoners. It was in the same decade that Muybridge began developing the origins of motion pictures by photographing the motion of galloping horses, that the last of the quagga species were hunted to extinction in the wild. 'The movie camera and the projector' notes Marshal McLuhan in his re-telling of the infamous bet that gave birth to cinema 'were evolved from the idea of reconstructing mechanically the movement of [horses] feet' (2). Sadly by this time the legs of the our quagga zebra would have fallen long silent as the last specimen died, locked in her enclosure, in at the Artis Magistra Zoo, Amsterdam on August 12, 1883.

Akira Lippit elaborates the concept of cryptic technology by first describing how the animal, philosophically, is not dissimilar from the photograph. This phenomenon is grounded in an ontological reading of the animal. Proceeding from a detailed recording of the 'animal being' within the philosophical works of thinkers such as Descartes, Schopenhauer, Hegel and later, Freud and Derrida, Lippit re-presents the axiom that 'animals are philosophically incapable of dying' (3). This ontological interpretation is brought into sharp focus by our appreciation of the communicative 'divide' that separates the human from the animal: language. "Denied the faculties of language, they remain incapable of reflection, which is bound by finitude, and carries with it an awareness of death." (4) "The proximity to the threshold of language is a trait common to animals and to another medium, photography". What the animal shares with the photograph is 'the haunted look': a look without subjectivity. Lippit seems to suggest that because animals lack language, and therefore subjectivity, they fulfil the same role, or exist in the same realm, as photographs. It is from this logic of survivability that he then goes on to relate to the facility of photographic technology. Barthes expounded this description of the camera's preservative technology in *Camera Lucida* when he states that although the photographed objects never die, they are always seen as "going to die" (5) : the photograph has the ability to depict, remarkably, "the living image of a dead thing" (6). Recollecting his experience of being photographed he writes: "I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feel he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version

of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a spectre.” (7) Lippit continues: “In lieu of comprehension, animals provide humanity with a glimpse of subjectivity at its limit” (8) and so too, the photograph performs the same function; as it successfully captures, or ‘suspends’ according to Barthes, the ‘punctures’ or ‘points’ of subjectivity piercing the objective apparatus. “The photographic look exhibits an attention without perception, a type of being without subjectivity. Animals are phenomenal beings that exist—that is their truth. Nonetheless, animals are said to exist without taking place in the world of being— and that is the madness.” (9)

In Lippit's view, animals are metaphysical ‘perpetual motion machines’ that brought ‘technology to life’: “the animal spirits that entered into the technological body turned technology into a species”. (10) Viewing our guagga zebra and his transference into



Thomas Edison
Electrocuting an Elephant, still from the film, 1903 ©

the technological continuum, his existence is not only enlivened by the technology, but it also enlivens it. The process is reciprocal, which resonates with Barthes' concept of ‘animation’ as a ‘spectator’ viewing a particular photograph: “suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it”. (11) This concept of animation underlines the life-giving ability of technology; a phenomenon that the animal gave it in the first place. Yet, this continuum functions concurrently as a kind of technological, metaphysical ‘crypt’: a phenomenon that the animal and the photograph both

share. (12) Lippit, in his final meditation on ‘cryptic’ cinema concluding his book, he talks about Thomas Edison's elephant being electrocuted and killed on film. Watching this film Lippit rather dolefully witnesses the ‘strange dynamic of life and death, representation and animal, semiotic and electricity’ (13) inaugurating cinema's narration of the disappearance of the animal. Edison's elephant, now forever captive in the realms of cinema and living perpetually on death row, repeatedly suffers his corporal punishment: the cinematic equivalent of the electric chair.

Delving deeper into the camera and its metaphysical associations is like walking into a Pandora's box-like architecture: a mysterious dark-zone in which the viewer/interpreter can wander and gaze curiously, perhaps dementedly, at the strange apparitions that haunt its interior. It is from this space that the ‘Zebronkey’ creature emerges: the video opens with the camera fumbling around in the dark, amongst faint voices and the noise of appliances being assembled and connected. A voice is heard calling and whispering to the animal, which soon appears out of the dark, only illuminated bit by bit by the green glare of the camera's night-cam function— first the hooves, then a little leg, a winter-coated belly, an upright ear, a muzzle and an eye. The screen falls black again and the coughing sound of a motor jerking into life is deafening compared to the precluding whispers. Finally after some long seconds of the engine buzzing in the dark and the voices disappearing beneath it, the projector powers up and illuminates the whole body of the donkey, contrasted with the surrounding gloom, which now wears a glowing new zebra-striped coat. After some seconds of the ‘zebra’ standing and gleaming in front of the projection, he wanders quietly off into the dark and the video fades.

The direct inspiration for the ‘Zebronkey’ work comes in fact, from the tale of the ‘zebras’ of Tijuana, the Western-most city of Mexico lying right on the American border. There, on the corners of Revolution Avenue, parading before gaudy monuments of Mexican paintings, flowers, ornaments and general tawdry tourist trappings, masked under thick stripes of paint and lurking strangely beneath the amusing narratives of their being: one find donkeys, painted charmingly in the guise of zebras.

Being a border city, and as a result of tourism from the US, the cultural constitution of Tijuana is a conglomeration of identities: a synthesis of the Spanish and English language and the Latin/North American ways of life. A local verb has even developed to articulate this variability and constant border crossing: “Tijuanear” (“to Tijuana”). The verb symbolizes the vibrating motion of a population fluttering on the threshold of two very different cultures. It is in this environment that the



Robin Thomson
Zebronkey, photographic and video work 2007 ©

'zebra' survives, who has unwittingly become a kind of simulacrum of this sociological hybridization. It is interesting to note that the donkey— 'animal of burden' — came to be the bearer of these mixed-up cultural and economic backgrounds; illuminating the social environment in which he exists.

Fundamentally, it is the tourist industry that has allowed the phenomenon of the zebra to survive: 'it somehow refers', says Néstor García Canclini in his book 'Hybrid Cultures', 'to the myth the north Americans bring with them, that it has something to do with crossing the border into the past, into the wilderness...' (14). Interestingly, it would seem that the discriminatory perceptions of Mexican culture precipitate the popularity of the 'zebras' found in Tijuana: as the perfect souvenir the tourist receives a photograph of himself perched on the painted donkey, with an artificial landscape behind him 'in which images from various regions of Mexico are crowded together: volcanoes, Aztec figures, cacti, the eagle with the serpent' (15): altogether conforming to the perception of Mexico that he has no doubt received through the media.

On the surface, the 'zebras' look like nothing more than failed deceptions: estranged animals parading fruitlessly in pitiful-carnival costume, but underlying the novel 'transfiguration' of the ass into an exotic zebra; if we shear the gilded 'zebra' hide and take a look at its humble origins, we uncover a phenomenon bound to technology of photography. The painted stripes were originally only an attempt to rescue the animal from his ghostliness. (We may say existed, for the contemporary 'zebras' have assumed another role: namely for novelty and tourism, and thus, money). Donkeys in Mexico are generally a light grey or sandy coloured animal, and of course much cheaper than horses. When these animals came to be photographed, depending on light conditions, they were sometimes indistinguishable from their backgrounds: the donkey appeared flat and two dimensional on the finished photograph.

In order to overcome these poor conditions, the photographer had limited choices: he could find a darker donkey or purchase a better camera. As an easier an inexpensive solution to these difficulties, the photographer took it upon himself imaginatively, to render his animal as a three-dimensional entity with thin



Robin Thomson

The zebra-painted donkeys have been popular with tourists since the 1940s ©

black lines projecting its body in actual space. This act of the photographer, this artifice, was what was needed, paradoxically, to engender something more 'life-like' in the photograph. In order to progress from unsatisfactory images, he had therefore to resort to the manual and ancient act of drawing; harnessing a kind of crude perspective drawing to patch up the unreality of his photo. Interestingly, if we think about the actual apparatus of the 'Camera Lucida' (after which Barthes titled his book), the action is not too dissimilar from what happens in the engendering of the Tijuana zebra. The Camera Lucida is an optical device used by artists to superimpose the subject being viewed onto the surface on which they are drawing, therefore allowing them to view the scene and the drawing at the same time, as in a photographic double-exposure. (16) The resulting image in the case of the zebra, which is a product of this double-exposure, is one of a subject inseparable from a surface.

It is ironic that the 'creator' of the original Tijuana zebra has had to resort to drawing to create this illusion of three-dimensionality when that is the speciality – the success – of photography. The hand of the painter/photographer (what do we call him?) entering the Mis-en-scene, with a black coated brush ready to enliven the animal/photograph anticipates what Barthes calls the 'punctum': it literally enters between, or into the photographic process, breaking the 'screen' of the normal 'point and shoot' image. This puncture injects life into the dull scene: a revival, so to speak, rescuing the animal from disappearance. The animating brush is the tool that brings the pale and fading existence vitally to life.

At the same time, ironically, Barthes spoke of this 'punctum' in photography as a kind of wound within



An early photograph of Tijuana Zebra ©

the photograph: a small detail that constitutes a 'prick, [a] mark made by a pointed instrument'. (17) Quite aptly, Barthes talks of those pictures that are 'traversed, lashed, striped by detail', which one could imagine to be the stripes of our 'zebra'. Before any 'punctuation' becomes written into the photograph, as it were, the animals that we are interested in are already wearing certain marks that have come to be interpreted mythically. The animals wear marking like an impenetrable text on their skin, and many interpretations have arisen trying to translate their meanings and origins. First of all the cross on the donkey's back is said to be a sign of the shadow of the cross that Jesus was crucified upon. It is said that the ass who carried Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and who couldn't bear to see his master suffering, turned away and then received the mark of the dark cross projected across his shoulders and back. (18) Unsurprisingly, the zebra's stripes have also been subject to various myths. One of which also involves a kind of branding: according to a Bushmen folk-tale of Namibia, the zebra was once all white but got its black stripes after a fight with a baboon over a waterhole. After



Robin Thomson
Zebronkey, photographic and video work 2007 ©

kicking the baboon so hard the zebra lost his balance and tripped over a fire. The fire sticks scorched his white coat, tracing black lines all over his body. (19) These anecdotes fit nicely into what Barthes would call the 'wound' of the punctum, and anticipate the painting act we see in the origins of the Tijuana Zebra. The mark making, the stripes, were always said to be wounds that the animal received.

This contradiction of 'enlivening' the animal at the same time involved in the 'wounding' activity of photography is what haunts the technological realm. The photograph is the place for mournful maintenance: conservation as well as lamentation. The two photographers involved in this twofold story of the zebra harness the same tool but for different means: one uses his apparatus to capture a fading species, whilst the other uses it to fabricate, and therefore 'release' one. The Tijuana photographer's act is a symbolic one: at the

same time as burdening his animal, he is somehow, symbolically, releasing another. 'Animating' the animal oversees a layering of concepts; an action that refers to the vitalizing processes of photography and film, this time turned about or inverted back upon itself and its origin.

The projected stripes—'electric animation' — are a metaphorical 'freeing' of the quagga zebra trapped in the filmic world. The 'electric animal'—to borrow Lippit's title— is released into the world, parasitic on the body of another: his being grafted onto the skin of the other so that he may exist in the phenomenal world for some time. Even before a metonymic reading of what the zebra might signify, the circumstances of the animals are already poles apart: the image of the zebra, in contrast to the mostly domesticated donkey ('beast of burden') is generally one of the wild zebra— crossing the savannas in harems or great herds, grazing in

grasslands or coastal hills. Therefore, in the act of 'painting' the donkey, the animal can be imagined to sneak off into oblivion: to escape the ageless tyranny of his 'master' by adopting the disguise of another, undomesticable animal. As each individual zebra's striped coat have its own unique pattern, you could say that the donkey at last assumes an existential 'makeup'—something similar to the distinctive stroke of the 'I'.

Unsurprisingly, the novelty of finding a donkey painted as a zebra proved much more entertaining than merely solving perspectival correctness. The zebra has a kind of theatricality about it, which goes hand in hand with the uncanny operation of the photograph in staging those 'living images of dead things'. Photography, according to Roland Barthes, is a kind of primitive theatre: 'we know the original relation of the theatre and the Cult of the Dead: the first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the dead, to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead'. (20) Yet this relationship with the photographs of the absent or the dead has received alternatively optimistic interpretations: '[they] may not be morbid, may not only offer an icon of death; it may, rather, serve as a magical summons aiming, rather, to enshrine identity...' (21) In the case of 'Zebronkey', the identity of the dead zebra looks to have been ecstatically brought back to life by some 'black art': wearing his carnivalesque suit of light, the donkey assumes the appearance of an other. In this mysterious light the camera technology actually fulfils the role of the necromancer: the technological 'medium' giving form to absent spirits.

Like the cross-bred city of Tijuana itself that the donkey-zebra came in time to personify, the 'Zebronkey' work somehow fuses the two zebra 'events' together into one single phenomenon: the quagga zebra disappears from the phenomenal world and becomes mediated by the photographic one whilst ironically, at the other end of the scale, the artificial zebra comes into 'being' only as a result of a poor photograph. This transference follows the narrative of the animal from physical, natural being to its mediated existence—wherein its artificiality and reality are entwined: "the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent". (22) Then we see the zebra leap symbolically 'out' of the technological world via the punctum of the photograph, springing electronically back into 'existence'. The projection is a kind of re-introduction of the zebra into the wild. Here, the memory of the quagga is revitalized, the animal itself appears like an apparition. 'Cinema', says Lippit, 'is driven by the wildlife after [the] death of the animal'. (23) 'Shooting wildlife' is a game of capturing the animal. This act of 'shooting', in the photographic sense, is a way

taking the animal's life: of "stealing his soul" *גנב נשמה*. Perhaps the fate of the quagga had already been sealed when the gate of her enclosure was bolted shut: already displaced from her natural environ, the passage from the terrestrial existence to a mediated one was already underway. As the shutter of the camera is released the doors are locked; the animal is doomed to captivity. The few photographs that exist were taken of the animal in captivity, somehow foreseeing the photographic 'enclosure' that it came finally and forever to inhabit. These photographs, active in the symbolic, future death of the animal, at the same time holds onto this theft: the living thing shot and captured is archived within a technological prison.

Alongside these images there are 23 taxidermic quaggas housed in museums around the world. It might be said that the museum only functions as another kind of crypt for the animal—perhaps not so different from its photographic counterpart fixing and sealing the subject in mock simulation of life. Sadly, the quagga species vanished completely without a single conservation attempt. It was only realized later that the mare in Amsterdam Zoo who died in 1870 had been the last of her kind. Her photograph is a lasting eulogy to her species.

It is in the intervening act of the Tijuana photographer's 'creation' of the zebra that I can imagine the symbolic attempt to resurrect and release the caged animal. The story of the video/photo work 'Zebronkey' takes this event—although the Tijuana zebra was never at all related to the fate of the quagga—as the means by which the subject of a technologically maintained animal might re-appear in the actual physical world. At the same time as recalling the sad fate of an animal and mourning its passing into extinction, the Zebronkey documents an attempt—on the part of Art—to resurrect this fading being: a reincarnation and illumination of an extraordinary creature.

1 Akira Mizuta Lippit, "Animetaphors" in *Electric Animal: Towards a Rhetoric of Wildlife*, 118

2 Marshall McLuhan "Wheel, Bicycle and Airplane" in *Understanding media: The extensions of man*, 182

3 Lippit, 173

4 Lippit, 187

5 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 96

6 Ibid, 79

7 Ibid, 14

8 Lippit, 174

9 Lippit, 176

10 Lippit, 188

11 Barthes, 20

12 Lippit, 183

13 Lippit, 197

14 Néstor García Canclini, "Hybrid Cultures, Oblique Powers" in *Hybrid cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, 236

- 15 *Ibid*
16 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camera_lucida
17 Barthes, 26
18 <http://www.bronners.com/legendofthedonkeyscross.html>
19 http://www.gateway-africa.com/stories/How_the_Zebra_Got_his_Stripes_San.html
20 Barthes, 31
21 Marina Warner, "The Camera steals the Soul" in *Phantasmagoria*, 201
22 Barthes, 80
23 Lippit, 197

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More information about my work can be found at www.robinthomsononline.com

ROGER BALLENG: UNCANNY ANIMALS

Roger Ballen depict an abstracted imaginary space that is inhabited by both animals and people. Mostly within grey, barren cell-like structures, nightmarish scenarios, which are unspecific in their narrative, are enacted. The oppressive intensity of this environment is created by the metaphorical or symbolic interplay of the spaces, the figures and animals, and the furniture and other paraphernalia that exist within – and in fact help create – this world.

Introduction by Ann Biroleau and Robert Cook

Questions by Giovanni Aloï

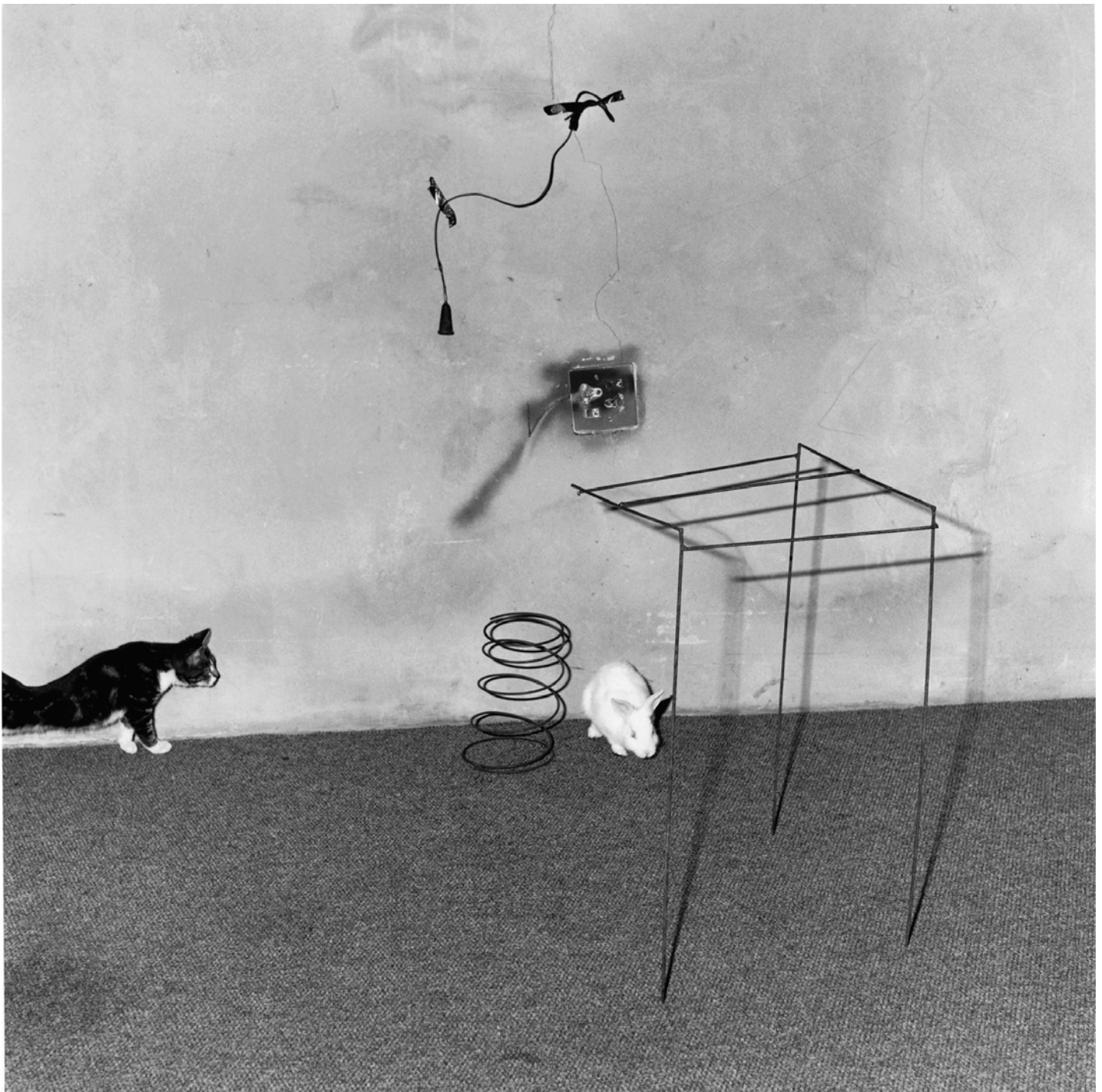
For Ballen, inspired by the American 'Field painters' of the 1960s and early 1970s, everything that resides within the visual field is significant. Accordingly, Ballen is not a photographer for whom standard divisions like subject and object, motif and background, make any sense: the drizzle and lilt of a wire, the shuffle of a shoe, the smear of sand on a wall are as important to the reading of the work, to its distinct power, as gestures more humanly communicative like a smile or grimace. This expanded pictorial focus produces a kind of animism where objects that might be mute in another photographer's work speak in a chaotic and compelling tongue, making even the most ostensibly naturalistic image more surreal than real.

Ballen's black and white photographs are acknowledged as being some of the most intensely challenging, even shocking, images being made in the world today. In them, humans, animals and inanimate objects are presented in taut arrangements that comment on the animism running through all things.

The Ballen beast, one of the fundamentals of his aesthetic, oscillates between the domestic animal (dog, rabbit, chicken, pig, duck, gold fish), the mock animals (plastic dinosaurs and lizards), and the disgusting parasites (mice, rats, flies). One can imagine that with

portrayals of killings, Ballen alludes at the lot befalling them in certain explored regions, their sacrificial use. But all in all, their presence adds spontaneity and innocence to that of the individuals.

Here, the relation between man and animal that appears playful touches however a profound truth of the human condition, the animal part, "becoming animal", as Gilles Deleuze said. The subjects crawl, climb on the furniture, open their mouth for silent roars (Roar, 2000), have the same behaviour as animals (Woman, man and dog, 1995). A model hiding his face behind the lifeless body of a chicken materialises this interference (Chicken mask, 2002). It is not a case of behaviour imitation, but a case of metamorphosis, a feeling, an expression of the affectations and the perceptions of the animal, captured in the photograph. If, in turn, it were abusive to speak of a human animal feeling, an anthropomorphization, still their presence and their glance interrogate us with a disturbing persistence. In Loner, the dog that turns his eyes towards the photographer has the same moving presence as that of Goya in the black paintings of the la Quinta del Sordo. Ballen's objective is not to reinterpret the symbolic function of the animal which is here a plastic subject, a volume in space. Whether alive or artificial the animal is an actor. The fluorescent eyes of the albino rabbits or the white mice, as with the details



Roger Ballen

Animal Abstraction, Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, 15.75 x 15.75 in, 2002 ©

of the still lives, constitute a discreet detail, an access point to the content of the picture and to the manifestation of the author's vision of the world...

"The style that I use to do these portraits has not been invented for a specific reason, it corresponds to my way of seeing things. If one considers my actual pictures, although they only contain inanimate things, the same sensibility intervenes." We interviewed Roger Ballen to

discuss the animals in his photographs.

You have spent most of your time in South Africa, photographing the countryside and its inhabitants, searching for aesthetic symbols to convey the sense of the place and people that have inspired you. How do animals come to be



Roger Ballen
Hanging Pig, Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, 2001 ©

part of some of your most enigmatic and uncanny images?

Since 1994, nearly all of my photographs have been taken in and around Johannesburg South Africa. During the period 1982 to 1994, my photography was centred in the South African countryside and

during this time I documented animals in their environment. My use of animals in my photographs was not a sudden occurrence, but evolved over a number of decades. Initially the images I shot had a somewhat documentary quality to them and as time has progressed from the late 90's onward, the works have become more aesthetic and complex in nature.

Your background involves studying geology; how did you become interested in photography and has geology influenced your photographic practice in any way?

I have been involved in photography since I was a young boy as my mother worked at Magnum Photos and started one of the first photography galleries in the US. During my childhood and adolescence I was introduced to some of the greatest photographers in the world as well as their images. I decided as a young man not to pursue photography as a profession but rather as a hobby or art form as I have never been particularly attracted to commercial photography.

My geological work brought me to the small towns of the rural areas of South Africa and it was as a result of being in these areas that I began to photograph these places in the early 80's. My first book was entitled "Dorps, Small Town of South Africa" and I always said this project was the most important of my career as it laid the foundation for most of my later work.

It has been said that your images are at once dark, disturbing, and funny. What role does beauty play in your work and more specifically in those images involving animals?

I don't necessarily define my work in any category as the meaning of my images is multidimensional and can be disturbing on one hand and humorous on another. Many people categorise my work as black humour. As far as I am concerned there is intrinsic beauty to all animals and therefore I do not have to work with the concept as it already exists.

What artists have informed your practice?

I have been influenced by all forms of art from early cave drawings to contemporary work. It is difficult for me to state that one type of art or particular period of art has been more influential to my development than the next. I believe my work is quite psychological in nature and may contain various aspects of 'Art Brut' or even Surrealism. Consequently, I might point to artists such as Dubuffet or Picasso but I could just as easily point to the influence of African or Oceanic art as important references in the development of my work.

In the photographs that constitute Shadow Chamber, we encounter an abstracted imaginary space inhabited by both animals and people. The oppressive intensity of grey, cell-like rooms nightmarish environment is created by the metaphorical or symbolic interplay of

the spaces, the figures and animals, and the objects that exist in this world. Why did you decide to include animals in the series and what role do they play?

Animals were an integral part of the **Shadow Chamber** space and it is hard to avoid their presence as they pervaded the environment. The animals, like everything else in the photographs, are part of a larger whole or meaning. It is not possible to define what role they play as it is not possible to define what role anything else plays in the photograph; except that they are integral.

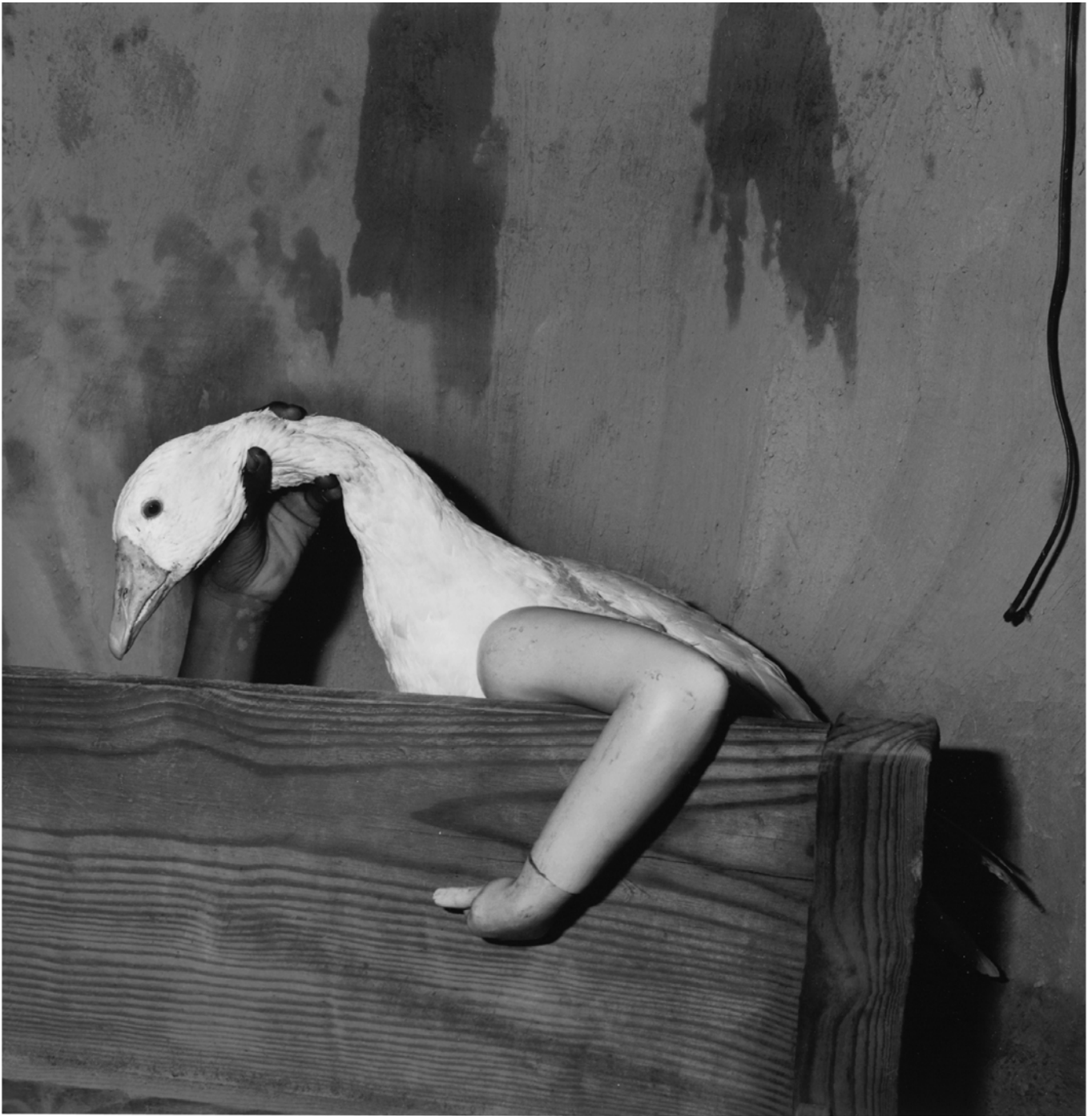
Large part of your career developed around a solidly original and sympathetic approaches to portraiture. You once said about the people you photographed that: "they were faced with revolution, fear, alienation, isolation, and rejection. The way these people were photographed, in my mind, was a metaphor for what a lot of people were feeling. They were feeling unsettled, alienated, and not able to cope in all sorts of ways." What is the difference between taking images of people and taking images of animals in your practice?

In my mind the major difference is that people are aware of the camera and the end result of being photographed and have some expectation of the outcome. Obviously, different people relate in different ways to the camera – some are very excited and willing to be shot whilst others are more shy and feel that the camera might intrude their physical being. For example, in Africa there are many states where people absolutely love to be photographed whilst in others there's a feeling that the camera, steals their spirit.

One of the most interesting, unanswered questions is "how do animals think". Unfortunately I have not been able to answer that question and as a result am not able to provide an explanation of what an animal thinks or feels when I attempt to take their photograph. On another level I do not feel self-conscious when I photograph animals whilst with people I have to take into account their sensibility as we interact.

How did the image 'Animal Abstraction' from 2002 come about?

It is not simple to describe how one of my photographs come about, as there are literally hundreds of interactive



Roger Ballen
One Arm Goose, Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, 2004 ©

pieces that must be unified within a split second. Certain aspects such as the lighting or the direction of the camera or the focus directly depends on me. Whilst other aspects of a photograph such as the movement of animals and the subtleties of the space itself are determined by externalities. For example in the image "Animal Abstraction" the cat decided to stretch at a particular time and by doing this he formally created a

visual relationship with the wire on the wall. The rabbit was running around the room and decided to stop near the metal piece. In some unexpected way, a shadow extended itself from the wire piece on the floor which added another dimension to the photograph. This photograph is very much like nearly all of my others – there is an interaction between what I do and what prevails at the time. Nevertheless, if somebody else was

in the same room with the same camera, in a lifetime, it is highly unlikely that we would ever take the same photograph. A photograph is no different to a drawing, no two people will ever make the same drawing in similar circumstances. Ultimately the photograph "Animal Abstraction" reflects my way of seeing / my way of being.

At times, animals in your photographs are seen performing what appear to be meaningless tasks. Why?

It is impossible for me to categorise what is meaningless and what is meaningful to an animal. What may seem to be a meaningless task by me might be very meaningful for the animal. It is well known that animals have much more developed senses than our own. For example a dog's sense of smell is perhaps a thousand times greater than a human's and whilst he may be walking around in a so called meaningless way, he may be receiving meaningful information through his nose about the world that he is interacting with.

The meaning of the animals in my photographs is strictly relevant to the photographs themselves. The images that I capture are self contained and ultimately reflect my world as I create it rather than trying to document a public world.

Can you tell us about 'One Arm Goose' in The Chamber of the Enigma?

The photograph "One Arm Goose" is one of my favourite photographs. Not only have I been able to link, many unrelated forms in an integrated way but at the same time I have created an aesthetic meaning that is ambiguous, beautiful and authentic in nature. For me, one of the most important aspects of this photograph that makes it captivating is the doll's arm next to the wing. The subconscious mind clearly links the origin of the arm to the goose's wing. I guess, somewhere in evolution there was a split – from a common element in one case wings evolved and in another case arms, feet, paws, etc.

What is the relationship between the animals and the people portrayed with them in your images?

The relationship between the people I photograph and the animals is multi-dimensional and complex, not unlike the relationship that exists in contemporary society between itself and nature.

In some of my photographs there is a very close and deep bond between the animals in the picture and the subjects that may own or live with particular animals. In other cases the relationship is more antagonistic in which the humans try to control every aspect of the animal's lives and see the animals as a means by which they can exploit their own needs.

Generally speaking, after encountering thousands of cultures travelling from one country to the next, I truly believe that the relationship between man and animals is antagonistic. In other words it is fundamental to human nature to perceive nature / animals as threatening and a phenomenon that they must protect or guard themselves against rather than something to spiritually nurture.

Your work has in a number of occasions presented the viewer with stuffed animals. Do they represent anything specific within your imagery?

In my book **Shadow Chamber** there are a number of photographs that contain stuffed toys most in the form of 'teddy bears'. These objects by their very nature symbolise an aspect of childhood and depending on how these toys or stuffed animals are used, different meanings are created. For example, in the photographs from **Shadow Chamber** "Orphan" and "Rejection" the hidden meanings behind the teddy bears are quite different than in the photograph "Excited man".

In Loner, a man lies on a slumped mattress. Above him a crucified baby doll has been labelled 'God' in big childish letters, below a little white dog looks back at the camera like he knows something we don't. What are the challenges presented by working with animals on set?

The major challenge for me in working with animals is to create relationships between the animals and the other aspects of the photograph. It is crucial that I capture the animal's demeanour in such a way that the viewer can interpret its meaning within the context of a human experience but as well as the meaning of the entire picture that the animal is contained in.

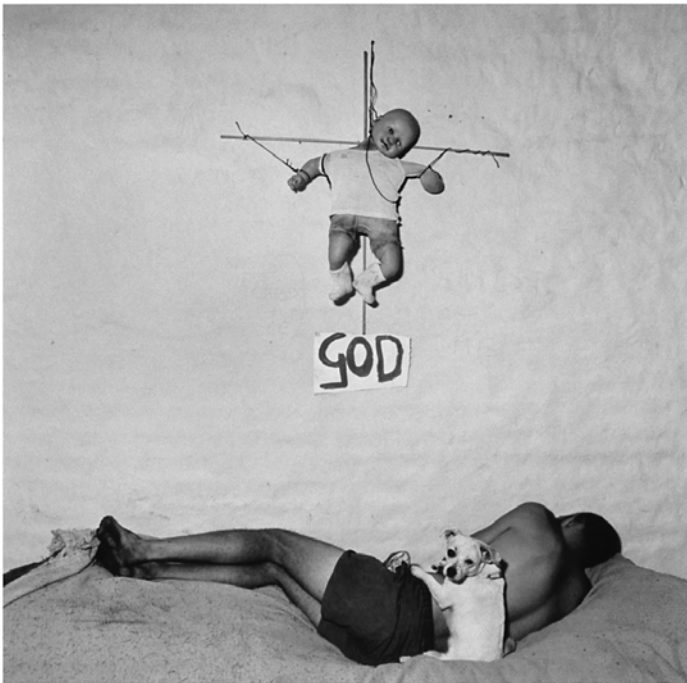
For example in the photograph mentioned above we sense that the dog feels compassion and concern for his master on the bed; this compassion or concern may have nothing to do with the way the animal is thinking or feeling but as an artist, I have been able to convey that meaning to the viewer and as a result of that interpretation the photograph makes visual sense. Furthermore, it is very important to notice the formal



Roger Ballen
Orphan, Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, 2002 ©



Roger Ballen
Orphan, Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, 2002 ©



Roger Ballen
Loner, Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, 2001 ©



Roger Ballen
Birdwoman, Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, 2003 ©



Roger Ballen
Puppy Between Feet, Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, 1999 ©

relationships that the dog is part of in the image, namely as he turns and looks at me, his formal relationship with the boy on the bed could be seen as a cross which again is part of the form on the wall. Another important formal quality is that the dog's eye has a similarity to the top eye of the doll on the cross.

Could you talk to us about Birdwoman from 2003?

The woman who is holding the bird in "Birdwoman" I knew for many years. Many thought of her as a witch and she was accused of burning people's houses down. The Birdwoman had a real affinity to animals and in the

small room that she lived in she sometimes had up to 30 dogs and cats as well as birds, rats and rabbits.

All her animals were very attached to her and she to them.

What are you currently working on?

Phaidon press will be publishing a new book of mine in the Spring of 2009 entitled **Boarding House**. In this project animals pervade the pictures in one way or another.

One of the most important developments in the use of animals in the **Boarding House** project is that many of the animals occur in the forms of drawings rather than in 3 dimensional objects. These drawings define a unique aesthetic space.

*A South African photographer born in New York in 1950, **Roger Ballen** was trained as a geologist. His mother, Adrienne Ballen, who was first a Magnum collaborator, opened a photography gallery in New York. At twenty-three, after graduating from Berkeley, he left New York and travelled around the world, in general by land: first through Asia, from there to Cape Town, via Cairo. After a year and a half in South Africa, he returned to the United States in 1977, to finish there his first book of photography, *Boyhood*, and, in 1981, he obtained his PhD.*

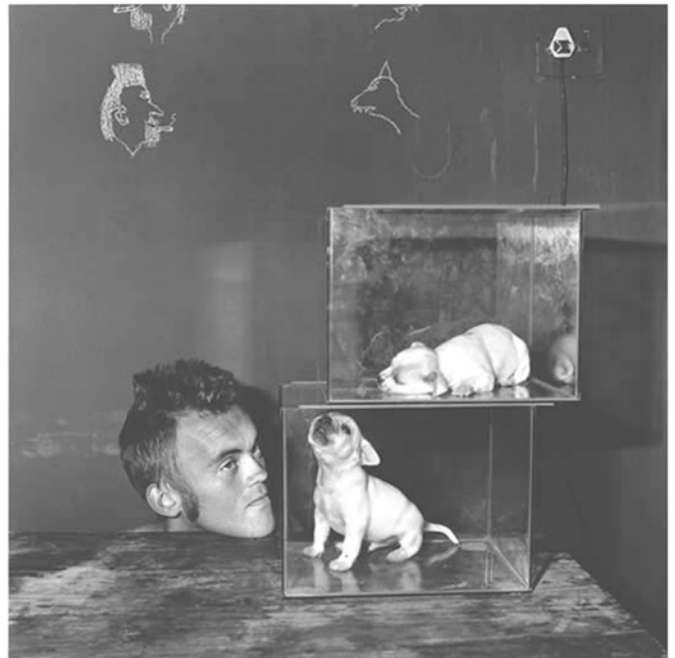
*Ballen then went back to South Africa, covering more than 100,000 km, searching for ore deposits. Equipped with a Rolleiflex SLX format 6x6, he took photographs of the small towns he travelled through. In 1985, he published his second book, *Dorps*, and on the same theme, launched *Platteland*, in 1994, and *Outland*, in 2001.*

*At the beginning, his work triggered a major controversy, but, today, it is recognised and exposed in the United States and in Europe. In 1995, he won the *Rencontres internationales de la photographie d'Arles* award.*

*His most recent work, *Shadow Chamber*, published in 2005, illustrates how the themes that he is concerned with evolve. For more information, please visit <http://www.rogerballen.com/>*

Roger Ballen was interviewed by Antennae in Summer 2008 ©

Many Thanks to Trish Fisher: without her kind and dedicated help this interview would have not happened. Also, many thanks to Roger Ballen for taking time to discuss his work with us.



Roger Ballen

Puppies in Fish Tanks, Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, 2000 ©

RICHARD BILLINGHAM: ZOO

Filmed in zoos across the UK, Europe and South America, the project explores the impact of confined spaces on animal behaviour in acutely observed detail.

Questions by Giovanni Aloï

For a couple of years, Richard Billingham went in search of the strangeness of those days out when in rare breaks from the monotony of poverty, his mum took him by bus to Dudley Zoo. The oddness of those encounters with the exotic - gorillas and giraffes in the heart of the urban West Midlands - stayed with him. He became a tower block natural historian; David Attenborough was his hero.

His research for Zoo, involved touring zoos from Berlin to Buenos Aires taking photographs and videos. The images captured during this travelling are collected in a book 'Zoo' and have been extensively exhibited in the UK and abroad.

Once again, Billingham used what he knows to use best: his observative skills. He first shot to fame in 1996 with his photographs of his mum and dad, Liz and Ray, in their council flat in the Black Country. The images and videos captured and exposed the, family squalor and desperate affection, of tattooed and overweight mum Liz eating her TV dinners and doing her jigsaws, while, Ray his alcoholic father, obsessed about the next drink and throw their cat up in the air. In a way, his work pushed to the extremes the diaristic approach of photographer Nan Goldin by focusing, quite literally, much closer to home, and exposing a family-reality that most of us would not want others to see.

Zoo, focuses on the psychological space of the zoo enclosure as the series also captures the complexities of the viewing relationship between captive

animals and their public audience. With this series, Billingham shows that he is as resolute in his photographs of his family as in his photographs of animals. Once again, his subjects are portrayed in a close but distanced manner aiming to avoid any sentimentality.

Like the colour-clashing riot of his family flat - his mother revelled in ornamentation - the monkeys and big cats are often subject to stylistic nightmares too. Sixties mosaic walls and harsh striplighting, parodies of greenness, incarcerate them just as surely out of time as in the wrong space. A rhino called Tsororo, whose name-plate explains his origins in Zimbabwe, stares out from behind three sets of bars in Frankfurt Zoo; a single tree trunk against a utilitarian tiled wall stands in for the jungle.

Some of the impetus for his looking seems to come from Francis Bacon's human menagerie of grotesques; the rest seems to arise out of the same feeling that prompted John Berger's classic observations on the animal gaze: 'With their parallel lives,' Berger wrote, 'animals offer man a companionship which is different from any offered by human exchange. Different because it is a companionship offered to the loneliness of man as a species.'

Why did you decide to turn to animals?



Richard Billingham

Ethiopian Lion, Copyright of the artist, Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, 2002 ©

I've always been very interested in nature. Although I grew up in a tower block on a rough council estate I took a keen interest in natural history documentaries—especially David Attenborough's—and I studied all the nature books in the local library.

I've always wanted animals to feature as the main subject in my work in some way. Zoo animals are neither domestic animals nor wild animals but something in between. If you see, for instance, a lone rhino in a zoo it operates more like a label for its species than a rhino in its natural habitat. Nor is it a tame animal like a pet or a farm animal, yet it is on display inside a pen as if to say 'this is what a black rhino looks like'.

Over the years I have found it very difficult to take photographs of animals in the wild without them looking like images from National Geographic magazines.

Making work about animals in zoos I have since found easier because systems of representation are already in place. There is opportunity for the work to be not just about the species you are photographing/videoing but our human relationship to it as well.

The photographic snap-shot language of the early work involving your family played a pivotal role in the audience's perception of the series. For Zoo you also worked with video; why this medium?

Is Zoo more of a documentaristic work or a painterly one?

I spent nearly a year trying to take photographs of



Richard Billingham
Gorilla 14, Copyright of the artist, Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, 2005
©

animals in zoos. Originally I wanted to have the animal quite small within its pen but moving a bit. I thought if I photographed it with half a second or quarter of a second exposure the animal would be blurred slightly within its pen, rather like some of Francis Bacon's paintings. However, they didn't work and looked very slight. I found that by using a video camera and a tripod to keep it static, I could record the movement of the animal much better, especially repetitive movement. When you see an animal moving in a video, you look at the animal rather than the pen. When you see a still image of a pen with the animal as a blur, you don't look at the blur but at the pen. So I found the videos worked much better for me to begin with. Video was a way to start the project, if you like. Some of the larger photographs in a gallery space echo the spectacle of a

zoo animal as seen through a large plate glass window in a zoo. Western zoos rarely have bars now.

John Berger's 'Why look at animals?' essay initially opened the way for the multidisciplinary debate concerned with the role of the animal in contemporary culture, and was subsequently re-interpreted by a number of scholars . What is your take on the essay?

I really like the John Berger essay, and it is inspirational. In the essay Berger talks about zoo animals being marginalized and often standing near the margins of their pens as though they're incidental. Candida Hoffa did a very good series of photographs on zoo animals where they were relatively small and looked incidental within



Richard Billingham
 Tapir, Copyright of the artist, Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, 2005 ©

the photos. However, I wanted to make photographs where the animals were much less incidental and in fact controlled the image compositionally, but were not sentimental in any way. I wanted them to be solemn but still have dignity. Right at the end of Berger's essay, you realize he's using the idea of zoos to illustrate some Marxist ideology. But I like the emotion and the images the writing conjures up.

Filmed in zoos across the UK, Europe and South America, the project explores the impact of confined spaces on animal behaviour in acutely observed detail. By focusing on the psychological space of the zoo enclosure, the series also captures the complexities of the

viewing relationship between captive animals and their public audience.

Zoo features both, rare and more commonplace animals; were there any selection criteria involved in the selection of animals to film?

There was no hierarchy to the way I chose the zoos that I worked in or the animals in those zoos. Around that time, I was doing a lot of travelling to various cities because of different shows I was having. Whenever there was a zoo in one of those cities, I would go to it to make work—staying an extra couple of days if need be. If I'd have chosen which zoos to go to, specifically to make work, I think would probably have chosen all the bad zoos where it would be easier to find shabby pens, real bars as opposed to glass fronts, and of course,



Richard Billingham
Bear, Copyright of the artist, Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, 2006 ©

stereotypical behaviour. That would have been the wrong approach.

You once said: “I think zoos are a perfect metaphor for our relationship to the rest of nature and this is what I am investigating. I am doing it without sentimentality, anthropomorphism or making the animals look funny”.

What do you think Zoo ultimately exposes?

I had a survey show a few months ago in Melbourne with family work, landscape work, and zoo work all displayed alongside each other. I don't think the zoo work exposes anything about zoos that we don't already

know, but I think it made sense of the other bodies of work on show there and vice versa.

One of the videos shows an elephant shaking its head restlessly from side to side in the same troubling motion. It is a motion that occurs for eight minutes in this film loop, and one that we suspect continues day in day out, for weeks, months, and years.

Is Zoo concerned with ethical and moral judgement of the captivity-condition?

If I was concerned with any 'ethical and moral judgment of the captivity-condition,' then the work would have been an illustration of this. I'm always careful not to be



Richard Billingham
Mandrills, Copyright of the artist, Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, 2005 ©

judgmental when I'm making work because then the work could become earnest. The last thing viewers want is to be told what to think. Better if you show them 'how things are'. Then they can make up their own minds.

Are you interested in animal-rights?

To an extent, but I am not a fanatic.

What are you currently working on?

Landscape and family subjects.

English photographer and video artist, **Billingham** graduated from the University of Sunderland in 1994 and in the same year took part in his first group exhibition at the Barbican Art Gallery, London. He came to prominence through his candid photography of his family in Cradley Heath, a body of work later added to and published in the acclaimed book *Ray's A Laugh* (1996). In 1997 Billingham was included in Saatchi's notorious *Sensation* show of young British artists, at the Royal Academy in London. Also in 1997, he won the Citigroup Photography Prize. He was shortlisted for the 2001 Turner Prize, for his solo show at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham. He now lives in Brighton, and travels widely. He also is a lecturer in Fine Art Photography at the University of Gloucestershire.

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Richard Billingham

Giraffe 2, Copyright of the artist, Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, 2005 ©

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